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Mediascene Preview

ISSUE 38

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THIS ISSUE

CONAN

EXCLUSIVE FILM COVERAGE

THE STORYBOARDS OF WILLIAM STOUT

SPECIAL: THE PRODUCTION ART OF
RON COBB

PHILIP DeGUERE INTERVIEWED ON
CHILDHOOD'S END
WITH ART BY NEAL ADAMS

THE BLACK HOLE STRIP BY
JACK KIRBY

FILMS COMICS MORE

NOW 48 PAGES

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A SUPERGRAPHICS PUBLICATION

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MEDIASCENE

I watched Buck Rogers die!

He had been trapped as usual by an insidious world conqueror bent on enslaving the Earth. This time he was sealed deep below the surface of an alien planet, in a kind of furnace room the floor of which was a fiery lake of bubbling lava, or maybe just some unworldly putrescent slime with a life of its own.

He was not alone. Commander Wilma Deering and a half-naked but high-born ally, Ryma, were imprisoned in the same dungeon. The chamber looked like the inside of an ancient sewer eroded by eons of chemical waste and scorched by molten heat. Foul steamy vapors climbed upward to the darkened ceiling of the crypt, through a criss-crossing maze of thick pipes that dripped with slime.

Buck pointed. "What do you think those pipes are for, Wilma? If they carry water, that means they're good and strong. And that hole beneath them can take us out of here."

"How're you going to reach the pipes?" she replied. "Fly?"

But the intrepid spaceman was way ahead of her. He produced a grenade taken from one of his foes a short time earlier, and explained the cherry-bomb-covered-by-a-tin-can reaction. While Wilma puzzled out the meaning of his statement, Buck left the safety of the narrow ledge on which they stood, and crossed the boiling lake on a low pipe. Reaching the other side, he retrieved the helmet. Then, very carefully, he perched atop it.

The explosion came an instant later, and propelled the tall spaceman toward the ceiling pipes—and the way to safety. But this time, fate decided against the forces of good. Buck only made it halfway to the overhead pipes—before he fell into the belching lava.

Fantasy is generally more exciting that reality, but in this case, the opposite was true. You see, Buck—according to the script—was supposed to reach the pipes.

The script, of course, was for the new Buck Rogers TV series, and the scene took place in Soundstage 34 on the Universal lot a few weeks ago. I had been talking with Alan Brennert, the show's story editor, and he suggested I update our earlier coverage of the Buck Rogers feature. Brennert, science fiction fans will recall, was nominated in 1975 for a John Campbell Award for his novel, **City of Masks**, and has since been developing TV movies and writing shows such as **Wonder Woman**. He says the series will have a different emphasis than the film, a difference which begins with Bruce Lansbury, the supervising producer whose credits include **Wild, Wild West** and **Mission Impossible**, to writers like D.C. Fontana and the staff and crew who hope to bring a vital, energetic force to the stories.

That's how I happened to be on the set. I was looking for an angle, something special to generate a possible feature in **MEDIASCENE**. The previous half hour had been spent in a screening room, watching the dailies (footage shot the day before) which featured Jack Palance as the villainous Kalad.

While the furnace room sequence was being set up, I took advantage of the situation by discussing the new series with the cast and crew. Gil Gerard, who plays the lead, was constantly surrounded by a swath of female fans, obviously in a good mood about the whole affair. I asked him if he was concerned about being typecast. "Not really," he replied. "The character of Buck Rogers calls for leading man material. He's not a super hero, but a man who does heroic things—and has a wide range of humor, drama, sensuality and action." We talked about his own production company's feature film, **Nemesis**.

Erin Gray, who portrays Wilma Deering, was even prettier than she appears on screen. She spent much of the time between takes repairing the damage done to her make-up during the action scenes. We chatted mostly about her role in **Evening in Byzantium** while she sat before her mirror.

Talking to the extras, the cameramen and the carpenters who built the set produced about the same results: nothing funny, nothing tragic; everything was right on schedule. Paul Peters, the set designer, revealed it had taken two weeks to build the furnace room scene, at a cost of $75,000.

The room itself was about 30' high with interior dimensions of approximately 15' x 15'. The faceted cement walls were really plywood, covered with some kind of workable facing. It was an impressive set, handsomely constructed. Best of all was the lava pool, a disgusting orange miasma on which floated patches of civety brown grit. The lava was colored water thickened with some additional substance. The grit was Kellogg's Bromulch Outdoor Planting Mix.

Belches that threw the lava a foot into the air at various points around the pool were made by a man who manipulated a battery of switches with his feet, much like a pipe organist does with foot pedals. The switches were connected to heavy black hoses that snaked around and into the set, disappearing just as they came into camera range. Copper tubing kept them company.

The set was being readied for the scene where Wilma and Ryma are forced into it. Then someone discovered there was no steam to give the appearance that the lava was boiling. The safety valve on the giant boiler just outside Soundstage 34 was struck again, and enough steam pressure couldn't be built up to produce the desired effect. Producer David O'Connell made the decision to substitute dry ice, and, a few minutes later, someone brought several bags of it to the set.

Special effects men, John Peyser, Jr. and Don Weir, broke it into large chunks and tossed it randomly into the pool. An eerie layer of vapor condensed just above the surface. Gaffer George Dahlquist shouted orders to place key spots, juniors and floods in all the right places. Shafts of ominous light cut through the dank set. Smoke slithered across the lake of slime, helped along by a big 15" rotary fan. It was a grand illusion of cardboard, plastic and styrofoam.

The set was ready and the scene with the woman [illegible] shot. The next [illegible] and's double ar[illegible] walking across a pipe to the opposite side of the dungeon. Finally, they were ready for the scene where Buck is hurled to the overhead pipes by the grenade blast. The effect was to be accomplished by an Air-ram, a catapult type of device that could propel a human high into the air by the force of compressed air.

The stuntman told me that he had practiced with it several days that week to get familiar with the action. Previous to this time, the height of an Air-ram thrust had been about twelve feet. This stunt called for twenty.

The cameras were in position and everything was ready. The stunt double took his place perched atop the helmet. He wore a harness concealed beneath his outfit which was connected to a thin cable that ran through the ceiling of the set. It would prevent him from falling in case something went wrong.

Which it did.

The double shot twelve feet into the air, peaked and dropped downward. The safety cable caught him in mid-air where he hung like a spider on a single strand until he was lowered. The stunt was repeated again with the same result; at the height of his trajectory he was still six feet short of reaching the overhead pipe.

Something had to be done. A crew of over 50 stood by while a decision was made. The new plan seemed simple enough: a rope would be tied to the safety cable; when the thrust of the catapult slowed, the double would be physically pulled up the rest of the way with the rope.

The rope was attached, run around a heavy water pipe near the wall of the soundstage and gripped by four burly men. The double got into position again, slipped a protective mouthpiece over his teeth and flexed into a crouch several times. He balanced atop the helmet. His left hand clutched the device that would detonate the explosion under the helmet and release the Air-ram.

The set got quiet. A voice called, "Ready! Rolling cameras A and B!"

Michael Caffey, the director, gave the final cue. "OK! You're on your own!"

The double took a deep breath. Then everything happened at once. The grenade detonated with suitable fire and smoke. The stuntman shot upward. The four men pulled the supporting rope. The pipe around which it was threaded broke. Water spewed out of it like a geyser, drenching the set and the crew.

And the resulting slack caused Space Ace Buck Rogers to plummet into the depths of the lava pool. It was only about eight inches deep. As he stood up, he said, "Welcome to Jack La-Lanne's Health Spa!" Another close shave for the cause of justice and truth.

I guess that's what they mean when they say, "That's show biz!"

STERANKO

It's not often that we come right out with an appeal to our reader's finer sensibilities, but, in this case, we feel completely justified.

Fandom has often been the target of con artists, crooks, conniver, cheap scams and contemptible rip-offs, but few calamities have ever equalled that which happened to the good people who throw the annual San Diego Comic Convention. This year was their 10th anniversary, and, as anyone who has attended the festivities during those years will tell you, theirs were among the very best supercons ever held in the country.

On August 5, the final day of this year's activities, they were robbed of their total convention assets—$6000 in cash and a similar amount in checks. To quote the official con statement: "On Sunday night, as we had been doing for years, the cash and checks were taken away from the premises and secured. But evidently we were being watched and followed. Thieves broke into the home of Vice-President Richard Butner, ransacked his room, and found the money. Fortunately no one was at home at the time of the break-in; people have been killed for less money. We are all in a state of shock."

They have many bills to pay as the result of the con, and the police say there is little hope of recovering the money at this point. They need help—and here's where we come in. Most of us have made (and sometimes lost) money in the course of pursuing our four-color habit. We've complained bitterly about the bad things, championed the good ones. Now we're faced with the inevitable task of putting our money where our mouth is. Here's my proposal: send me a check for $20 made out to the San Diego Comic Con; I'll send it along to them and will give you a full year's subscription to this magazine. In other words, I'll match every $20 donation to the Con with a free sub to the donor. In addition, because they're a non-profit organization (no back talk, please) the amount is fully tax deductible. And every donor will be sent the big, tabloid program book from this year's convention.

The best benefit, of course, will be the satisfaction derived from the knowledge that you have helped others like yourself at the moment they needed it most. Give your ego a boost—NOW!

Should you want to make a contribution to their cause for either more or less than that amount (believe me, no amount is too small), send it directly to RECOVERY, BOX 17066, SAN DIEGO, CA 92117. They have made an extraordinary contribution to both the world of fandom and the medium of the arts; here's your chance to reciprocate. Make yourself feel good.

GRADUATED THANKS

When I first read your editorial in **MEDIASCENE** 37 I thought, oh boy, Bismarck is using the graduation story to give us his usual ho-hum, hard-working, rags to riches life story. But, after having read the piece, I changed my mind. So I'd like to thank you. You see I just graduated from an advertising art course at the local college. It was two arduous years and probably the second toughest thing I have done in my life; making it in the field will be the first. That's why your column meant so much. I think I feel that determination that you felt when you first entered the field. I've just undertaken my career, you're at the height of yours. It's good to know that good guys still win.

Peter Dawes
Winnipeg Manitoba

Sometimes it's hard to distinguish the bad guys from the good, Pete—but that's the subject of another editorial. The only thanks necessary will be your success.

FROM THE HEADMASTER

That was a lovely, nostalgic, autobiographical essay/editorial in **MEDIASCENE** 37.

It was a pleasure having you at our school's graduation party, along with our good friend, Harry Chesler. We are looking forward to next year's graduation festivities with both you and Harry as our guests. After all, both of you were involved in the school's conception and birth, and it's good that you both can watch it grow.

Muriel and Joe Kubert
Dover NJ

It's a date!

UPDATING THE RATHOLE

I would like to see other readers write in about their experiences in the field, not necessarily as horrific my *The Rathole on Pack Avenue*, but just as a pooling of knowledge and stories that we can all enjoy and benefit from—it would be better than another letter that says, "Gee, Jim, aren't you going to draw for us anymore?" Incidentally, I ran into one of the stars of my article, The Drugstore, while just walking down the street in New York City one afternoon. Amazingly he had read the article in **MEDIASCENE** and said he liked it, though he said Mr. Jitters (who is at another magazine company now) wasn't too happy about it. The Drugstore got off with probation for his jewel robbery and is working at an advertising agency now—the ironic ending to all this is that they're both doing well and I'm unemployed. I can't win.

Then there's **The Rocky Horror Picture Show** which you couldn't pay me to see, even if I was promised all the time freezes I could drink. Harlan Ellison, in his introduction to **Strange Wine**, tells about the elderly woman who sees the soap opera she watches every day as a surrogate friend, and dresses for them and prepares lunch to be with them. Is this any different than these people going to see this movie, not because they like it artistically, but because it satisfies some lonesomeness within them to have something to belong to, to believe in, and to identify with—a 1976 version of the Knights of Columbus? **The Rocky Horror Picture Show** (which looks a bit like a cross between **A Chorus Line** and **Carnival of Souls**, from the stills you printed) may go down in history as the first film to gross 90 million from just the same twelve people seeing it again and again. Incredible.

Dan Recchia
Mamaroneck NY

Of course it's incredible, that's why it warranted a feature in this magazine. RHPS is a media/cultural phenomenon so interesting as it is bizarre. The theme and presentation of the material may not be for everyone, but the fact that it exists is grist for every thinking individual's mill. And you thought **MEDIASCENE** *was just another pretty face!*

PRINCIPLES VS LIBIDO

I'm ambivalent about **MEDIASCENE** 37—my pro-feminist principles bridle at the whole notion of pin-ups and "glamour" art; yet at the same time my nagging male libido is all in favor of it, no questions asked. At any rate, the coverage (so to speak) of Caroline Munro was most welcome—although there's always the risk that too much attention to someone who has been more or less a cult figure may tend to wreck the mystique. Caroline Munro is still mainly just a face and a voice—whether there's any kind of film personality behind that is something yet to be seen. Fortunately, the **MEDIASCENE** piece itself struck the right balance in this regard, although maybe three times as many photos wouldn't have been overdoing it. (Oddly enough, as herself—on a Mike Douglas broadcast a couple of years ago—she seemed not the least bit sultry, but in fact very perky and schoolgirlish, suggesting that if she can ever get away from her image she may fit into a great many roles.)

I chose not to finish the article on the **Star Trek** movie, at least not in detail; I prefer to be surprised. I do have occasional misgivings about revealing a substantial portion of the plot of a film several months away from release (as with your coverage of **Superman**). Still, I suppose it's like the old argument about offensive movies, tv shows, etc.: if you don't want to look at it, you don't have to look at it.

Rocky Horror, or the idea of it at least, has never much appealed to me, but I expect it's a matter of taste, not critical judgment. It's tempting to suggest that that sort of production is an exercise of form and spectacle over content—but on the other hand I think it was the imagery, visuals, and suggestive symbolism of **2001** that grabbed me, and not the basic storyline, so I can hardly complain.

One last note: I caught the **Star Wars** reissue the other night, including the trailer for **The Empire Strikes Back**, and the new film really looks good. They seem to be treading the right line between new and old, keeping the mix of adventure and humor, and branching out in imagination. (The narrative V. O. was bad, but easily ignored.)

Garrett Hayner
Newtown Square PA

Our readers were split on the All-Girl issue, though most were in favor of the theme. My editorial stand remains firm: any topical, relevant and entertaining subject presented tastefully and informatively can and will find its way into **MEDIASCENE**.

You may have noticed that whenever we synopsize a plot, we always have certain omissions to accomodate the ultimate viewing, in the case of Star Trek, much was already publicly known about the action—we simply tightened it up. Just before we went to press, however, another magazine revealed the film's ending, and I felt that our readers deserved no less—as we told perhaps more than we planned originally, and left the final decision as to whether or not to finish reading the piece to the individual.

The Voice Over on the Empire trailer belongs to Harrison Ford, a potential candidate for this year's Chere Acting Award. Word has it that a new V.O. will be dubbed into the trailer soon. As you may have guessed, **MEDIASCENE** *will feature some spectacular Empire Strikes Back coverage in the next few issues.*

BUSTING WITH PRIDE

I thought I'd drop you a line to thank you for the article about me in **MEDIASCENE**.

Since my **Pete Quido** cover in '75, there have been many articles about me and my gals, and I must say yours is by far the best.

Since you've mentioned how the size of my breasts (not mine, my gals') have grown over the years, I thought I might mention how that came about:

To begin with, huge bosoms weren't "the thing" when Torchy began. Lana Turner was the sweater queen in those days, and, although quite mobile, they weren't much larger than two cups.

Then Jane Russell, Anita Ekberg, and Marilyn Monroe came on the scene, and Lana Turner seemed rather like a boy.

As you well know, artists are controlled by editors and publishers, so my gals' busts inched outwards as per their requests.

I live in Ridgewood, a small New Jersey town, where everyone knows the mailman, and he in turn reads every postcard. Imagine my chagrin when I received a card from one of my art directors: "Ward, your boobs aren't big enough to suit the publisher, make them bigger-bigger-bigger!!" For months afterward everyone would titter (no pun intended) when I entered the post office.

Thanks again for the article.

Bill Ward
Ridgewood NJ

We've always believed in giving credit where credit is due—but you didn't tell us where it would end, Bill! You've spent a lot of years and worn down too many pencils to count in establishing yourself as King of The Comic Pin-Up Artists. The pleasure is all ours.

THE IMAGERY OF OFFENSE

I've enjoyed **MEDIASCENE** this past year, though issue 37 I would consider a bit sexist. I am, to be honest, quite offended by the Bill Wards of this world. Their image of women is rather infantile—in the gigantic breasts and their simplemindedness. *The Comic Girls* might better be called "women," there is a distinction. Editorial over.

I recently saw a trailer for Disney's **The Black Hole**—most fantastic thing I've ever seen. Hope you get to see it.

Comics are becoming less and less interesting. I don't look forward every week as I used to. I think it's both of us that are changing.

Michael Goldberg
Los Angeles CA

Don't worry about the changes, Mike, the world is full of interesting things. As you can see from the previous letter, it is not Bill Ward who is responsible for offending your sensibilities, nor his publisher—but the taste of the Great American Public.

I am well aware of the distinction between girls and women, and it is not the size of their waistline as you seem to suggest. No, I'll still go with my original title, The Comic Girls—and look for women elsewhere.

I'm glad you liked the Black Hole Trailer; you'll doubtlessly be interested in Jack Kirby's adaptation of the film and our coverage of it in this issue. I spent a day or so at the Disney Studios gathering information and visual material for an extensive feature on **The Black Hole** *which will run in the next issue of* **MEDIASCENE**. *Long interviews with Peter and Harrison Ellenshaw, the production and special effects men, and Gary Nelson, the director, will be the core of that feature—and you have my promise that the film's climax will not be revealed. Hope you'll be with us then.*

MEDIA MAIL

Send your comments, complaints and criticisms to: MEDIAMAIL BOX 48/READING, PA. 19603.

Hither came Conan the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandaled feet. At the sack of Venarium, still short of his full growth, Conan already stood six feet tall and weighed 180 pounds. He had the alertness and stealth of the born woodsman, the iron hardness of the mountain man, the Herculean physique of his blacksmith father, and a practical familiarity with knife, ax and sword.

—The Hyperborian Chronicles

"I'm going to give people some good pagan entertainment. I'm not holding myself back. It's **Conan the Barbarian**; what do you expect? If people think it's too violent, they can see another movie."

—John Milius

Born in the pages of **Weird Tales** magazine in December 1932, Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian has led a long, lusty and violent life. Within a few short months, that life will be reenacted for the motion picture cameras.

Rather like Horatio Alger among the hordes of Genghis Khan, Conan has become a legend larger than life—a legend which grows daily, fed by a Niagara of paperbacks, hardbounds, comic books, magazines and a newspaper strip.

Over the past five years there have been more people involved in bringing Conan to film than there were Huns involved in the sacking of Rome. When the smoke of several property rights battles finally cleared in 1977 with the formation of Conan Properties, Inc.—a kind of society for the preservation and protection of the spoils of Cimmerian warfare—the valuable movie rights were the booty of producer Ed Pressman.

Nearly two years passed while Conan storylines and treatments were produced to interest the money moguls of Hollywood. Bodybuilder Arnold Schwarzenegger was signed to a five-picture contract, insuring that Conan would be his only barbarian role. The whole Conan project appeared about to take off in 1978, when **Midnight Express** screenwriter, Oliver Stone, began to work on a sword & sorcery screenplay.

Then, in the spring of 1979, John Milius came to the Conan picture, first as the film's director, and subsequently as its writer as well. As a director, Milius was known for the virile action of **Dillinger, The Wind and The Lion** and **Big Wednesday**. His career as a writer was studded with memorable titles like **Jeremiah Johnson, The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean** and **Magnum Force**, as well as parts of **Dirty Harry, Jaws** and **Apocalypse Now**. He had also formed his own production company, A-Team, which stamped its brand on **Big Wednesday** and Paul Schrader's **Hardcore**.

Milius brought the Conan project its first solid monetary commitment, by way of Dino DeLaurentiis, who agreed to let Milius substitute his barbarian epic for a scheduled mountain man film called **Hail the Sky**.

The wit and wisdom of John Milius are notorious throughout Hollywood, and the unconventional nature of both his writing and lifestyle are uniquely suited to the savage subject matter of Conan. "I believe in the barbarian ethic," he says calmly. "I have a distrust of these civilizing influences that are on all of us."

Despite his bombast, however, Milius is faithfully attempting to give Conan character and emotional depth, without violating the traditions already established. He is adding elements of background and personal dimension that enhance the character perfectly along the lines laid down in the Howard canon of twenty one original stories.

Meanwhile, his staff at A-Team is hard at work creating the visual groundwork for the exotic Hyborian civilizations. Ron Cobb is the film's pre-production art director—a position similar to the one he filled in **Alien**. Underground comic artist William Stout is storyboarding Conan in an unusual comic page/panel format. The following interviews are the first in a series of **MEDIASCENE** exclusives on the behind-the-scenes production of Conan the Barbarian.

William Stout has spent the past ten years building an impressive reputation as a west coast cartoonist and illustrator. His work ranges from underground comics to movie posters, and he is equally as adept at black and white line art as he is with full-color tonal rendering. Stout's taste runs toward science fiction, horror and heroic fantasy, and he is an expert in paleontology. Recent endeavors have turned him in the direction of motion picture production design (**MEDIASCENE** 3B), and his latest project is on the Dino DeLaurentiis film, Conan. Stevanko interviewed Stout at director John Milius' operations base in Burbank, California on Tuesday, August 14, 1979.

CONAN
THE FILM
PART ONE: AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH STORYBOARD ARTIST
WILLIAM STOUT

STEVANKO: Conan is the kind of property that most fantasy illustrators would give their left arm to work on. Why did Milius call you?

BILL STOUT: John was looking for artists, specifically comic artists who'd never been involved in movie work, artists with a fresh approach. He didn't want a traditional look to the film, but something totally new. I didn't tell him I'd worked in film before.

JS: By the time he reads this interview it'll be too late. What kind of fresh approach did he expect comic artists to bring to the film?

BS: He didn't say. He was quite enigmatic about that, and I never actually found out what it was he saw in my work that triggered him, because he considered a number of comic artists before deciding on me.

JS: Like who?

BS: John Buscema, Ernie Chan, Alfredo Alcala, Neal Adams, Rudy Nebres, Howard Chaykin, Frank Brunner, Dick Giordano, Walt Simonson, Tim Conrad, Carmine Infantino, Mike Ploog, Al Williamson, Russ Heath, Joe Kubert, Gerry Talaoc, Alex Toth, Russ Manning, and Paul Norris.

What happened was that samples, mostly cut from the

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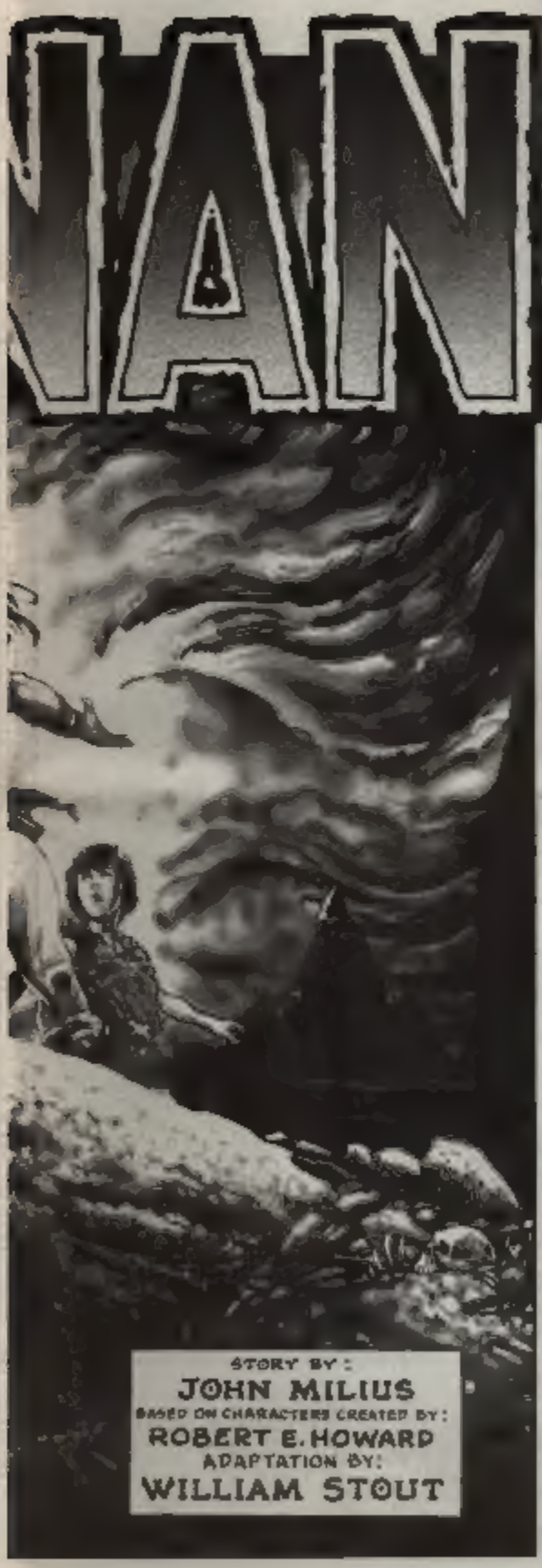

Conan comic books, were submitted by the producer's assistant, Bob Greenberg. Ron Cobb picked out the ones he liked, and showed them to John, who went through and vetoed the ones he didn't like.

At the same time, Greenberg had been bugging me to go over and see Ron, but I was tied up with commercial work, doing one-sheet movie posters. I finally got a break from that, and met Ron at the ABA convention in July. I had my samples with me, so I showed them to him, and he said to come by A-Team. When I finally made it, Ron was on business in New York, but I came at a time when Milius was in. Ron had left word that I was at the top of his list of artists he wanted to work with.

JS: Do you recall what was it of yours that John liked?

BS: I showed him a variety of stuff that was realistic in tone and lent itself to the fantastic approach. The things that got a response were the **Dragonslayers** portfolio and *Sheltered Like a Glass Goblin* which I had done for the **Illustrated Harlan Ellison.** When he saw that, he said, "Hey, this is great stuff." He looked at *Goblin*, he looked at **Dragonslayers**, he walked out of the room, and as he walked out he said, "You're hired."

JS: That's all it takes. Richard Corben was not on the list. Why?

BS: Corben is already a personal favorite of John's, the comic artist John would like to have working on Conan more than anyone else.

JS: Is Corben going to work on the film?

BS: Corben said that he would. He's already done one piece and promised others, but they haven't come through yet. I suppose an ideal working agreement just hasn't been reached.

JS: There's also the aspect that Corben is reluctant to move from Kansas City to Hollywood. What was it about Corben's work that Milius liked specifically?

BS: Milius was knocked out by **Bloodstar.** He liked the starkness and brutality of it, he liked the value systems, the dark feeling and type and mood that Corben achieved. He liked it, in fact, much more than **Den.**

JS: I also get the feeling that Milius liked Corben's concept of the human figure—vastly overmuscled. Buscema's figures are more supple than Corben's. Corben strives for mass, while Buscema opts for grace, even though his figures have bulk.

BS: I think Buscema is also a more conservative artist, whereas Corben's stuff is very refreshing, like no other artist, really, except possibly Frank Frazetta.

JS: I agree with you that Corben is a stylist, in both his art and his continuity.

BS: Corben's also had experience in film, and it shows in his comics.

JS: What you've got on the board now is essentially a comic book approach to storyboarding a film. Why aren't you working in cinemascope-shaped frames?

BS: I started doing traditional storyboards. John saw this and said, "No, I want you to do it like a comic. I want you to direct the film the way you would direct it on paper. I've got every shot already in my mind, blocked out. But you'll probably come up with some ideas that are better than mine, and I want to use you in that way, so I can pull ideas from the comics. There's no problem with the panels not being screen shape, because we can use them to indicate pan shots." He definitely wanted a full-tone black and white approach without word balloons. That's the one difference. It's done in **Prince Valiant** style, with dialogue below the panels.

JS: You're working directly from his script, aren't you?

BS: Yes, but I also have the freedom to interpret it any way I see fit.

JS: You mean, for example,

where he might devote one sentence to a particular incident, you might expand it over three or four panels.

BS: Yes, that's something I've already done.

JS: Or the opposite: you might condense a scene into one big illustration instead of chopping it up into several little panels.

BS: I can emphasize the points that I feel are important in telling the story. He hasn't said anything, but I've been changing his dialogue, too. In 90% of the areas, the dialogue is excellent. But there are a few modern phrases that I don't feel are consistent with the story that he's trying to tell.

JS: Is there a particular approach that you've used on the Conan story that's different from the one you used on *Sheltered Like a Glass Goblin*?

BS: Yes, I've got more time. That's something that doesn't happen very often. And I'm going for a much heavier mood. I'm trying to catch on paper the mood that film directors like Kurosawa and Eisenstein have in their work.

JS: For example?

BS: Stark lighting, heavy blacks, careful attention to pose, expression and characters, sensitivity for detail in the dressing of the sets.

JS: It looks like this storyboard could eventually become a book. At the pace you're doing it—you've got four pages done now—it could be 150 pages long or more.

BS: It could easily be that long. And there's no restrictions—John wants as many pages as it takes to finish it. I'm averaging about two a week. So, one hundred fifty pages would take close to a year-and-a-half. Hopefully I'll gain speed by the thirtieth page or so.

JS: Aren't they hoping to go into production next summer?

BS: Yes. But John's still writing at this point. I think he's going to wind up with a 150-page script.

JS: That script has to have an emphasis on weaponry. There's got to be an entire approach to swords, daggers, crossbows and armor in particular developed.

BS: That's right. The entire culture is being designed from the ground up. The only way to create a convincing Hyborian world is to design everything down to the sword handles and the latches on the doors. Everything has to be planned out with a wealth of detail and consistency of thought. I believe it will all add up to a convincing film.

JS: That's a pretty tall order. It's like designing an entire age.

BS: That's exactly what it is. We want the viewer to be lost in that age, we want him to be totally convinced that there was a Hyboria, that there was a Conan, that all of this actually happened.

JS: What kind of reference have you drawn on to create that kind of imagery?

BS: It's a combination of my imagination, plus researching ancient cultures to see how they figured out why things worked, then adapting our stylistic and design elements into their materials and tools. We're relying mostly, though not solely, on Celtic and Viking cultures.

JS: How about the Mongol cultures?

BS: Yes, the Mongols and a bit of the Samurai in the beginning, but we're getting away from that now. Each race, every army in Conan will have a distinctive look. The costumes within an army will all be dissimilar, but they will have a consistency of design. You will be able to identify cultures just by the style of the costume and the banners and standards.

JS: Milius must know, at this point, the entire action of the script, most of it in tight detail. What are the significant differences or similarities between the way Milius has envisioned Conan and the way Howard wrote the Conan stories?

BS: John's film will be very close to what Howard created in the books. It will have that same richness of detail, and be very visual.

John is extremely close to the material right now. I think that Howard and Milius, in many ways, are also very similiar, personality-wise. They're both very physical people. John has been described as a barbarian by a number of his friends. They're even close in terms of age, and size, too. John's a very powerful person. He's been a surfer for years and years, and he still goes surfing. He collects guns too, like Howard did.

JS: Almost like an incarnation?

BS: Well, it's ok as long as John doesn't blow his brains out before the picture's over.

JS: Did Milius read the Conan

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ALIEN

stories? Did he do his homework?

BB: Before he went into the project he hadn't read any Howard tales. After starting to write, he stopped to take a look at the Conan books, threw out all the stuff he had written, and then started a new script, employing different elements from various Conan stories.

JB: Do you know anything about the earlier Oliver Stone script? Have you read it?

BB: No. I've just heard it was impossible to film.

JB: What's your feeling as you read through Millius' script? What is your reaction regarding the character of Millius' Conan specifically?

BB: I think that Millius has really gone beyond Howard in giving Conan a definite character. Howard's Conan didn't have much. Millius' Conan has the same actions, but you begin to understand the motivations behind the actions. There is a richer sense of the character coming through in the film than there is in the books.

JB: You're a [redacted] of Howard's writing, a fan of his work, especially Conan. Because you know all of that material, is it your feeling that Millius can capture the true essence of Howard, the action, the color, the romance, the violence, in this film?

BB: I most definitely do. John has proven himself an excellent director of adventure epics. The Wind and The Lion is a good example. The Conan script is very Howardesque, full of the heavy drama, the violence, the action that Howard is known for. I don't see how he could possibly miss pleasing all the Howard fans.

JB: John is planning on capitalizing on the action of Howard's prose by showing it on screen, in other words, when heads and arms and legs get cleaved in two. John has every intention of showing it on screen, showing the brutality of barbarian life. How do you feel about that?

BB: I think that's definitely the right way to go. I'm sure John will do it with taste, if there can be such a thing as tasteful headless corpses. If it can be done, it'll be done by John.

JB: It's the kind of thing that we've come to know, like Sam Peckinpah's Wild Bunch, with its rivers of blood. What percentage of the film would you say is devoted to swordplay and action?

BB: Well over half the film is action. It's a very fast-moving, high-paced film. But a lot of attention is also given to character [redacted] and sympathy for the characters, there's a lot of warmth to the script.

JB: Does Conan show these kind of emotions? Or is he just a fighting machine?

BB: He's very human. The warm scenes that I've read so far are in Conan's youth. There's a very tender scene showing his relationship with his mother and his father. As he gets older events happen which turn him into a more cynical individual. However, he never relinquishes his penchant for camaraderie. For instance, one of the friends that he makes forms a relationship like Errol Flynn and David Niven in **Dawn Patrol**. It's that kind of tight, personal relationship.

JB: That's a Millius touch, of course. Howard's Conan was a loner, for the most part.

BB: No, in *Red Nails*, a camaraderie is built between Conan and Valeria. They piddled each other and fought side by side.

JB: What's the difference in attitudes between this film and, let's say, the Steve Reeves muscle films of the 60s?

BB: This film is definitely more sincere. John is a fantastic storyteller. The characters will be much more three-dimensional than the characters in the Steve Reeves movies. And it's not going to be a muscle film. The story is carried along in terms of the action of the characters, and not really the dialogue.

BB: The dialogue, as I have read it so far, is merely used to propel the plot. The action and the cinematic qualities of the script do that by themselves. The dialogue is merely to define character and also to add spice. The dialogue is very rich. There's a lot of humor in it.

JB: Can you take a guess at which Howard stories may have influenced John's action? Are there any tales that he may have drawn scenes or characters from in particular?

BB: There are two stories that I know are used in the script. One is *Tower of the Elephant*, and the other is *The Thing in the Crypt*. Primarily he uses the action and the setting. He takes the strongest elements of each story

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[redacted] will be [redacted] most of the time. That's one way that the Conan character will be different from the way Frank Frazetta portrayed him. John feels that the climate that Conan was living in, in Cimmeria, just by the maps that Howard drew himself, is much colder than Frazetta has interpreted.

JB: So he'll be wearing skins and capes, armor and leather clothes?

BB: Yes. The emphasis is on the story, not the muscles.

JB: How much dialogue is there in the film?

BB: There's not a lot. The dialogue will be sparse because that's really the way the character comes off in the stories, as a very calm person, a man of few words. But when he says something, everyone listens. That type of strong character has become a tradition in American films.

JB: So you're saying that the and weaves them into his own script.

JB: John's gone to Europe to scout locations. Can you tell us anything about that?

BB: One place he has in mind is Germany's Black Forest. He admires German technical skill, and has hopes of working with a German crew. He's also thinking of shooting in Yugoslavia, because the Yugoslavian government has promised him that he can use their entire army for the battles in the film.

JB: Did John tell them he plans to use real swords? Or is he saving that for a surprise? All kidding aside, is anything solid yet?

BB: Many of the Iron Curtain countries are being considered because of the access he would have to their manpower.

JB: What does John plan to do about casting the characters? We know Arnold Schwarzenegger is signed for the Conan role.

BB: People are going to be surprised when they see Arnold, because at this point, he is slimming down for the role. He's not going to be quite as muscle-bound. He's stopped entering bodybuilding contests—he's retired from that.

JB: Has he read the script yet?

BB: I don't know. He hasn't been in while I've been there, but Ron's seen him. Arnold is incredibly enthusiastic about the part. He feels the role was made for him, and he'd do anything short of killing to keep that part.

JB: Could he possibly turn his portrayal of Conan into a super-role, like Christopher Reeve did with Superman?

BB: That's what I think Arnold hopes to achieve.

JB: He's only been in one or two films so far, and he really wasn't given a chance to explore his potential as an actor. In Pumping Iron, he simply played Arnold. But the reviews he got were very, very good.

BB: He seems to have a presence on screen. I think that's important, and he's very intelligent.

John would like to have Thulsa Doom played by Sean Connery, whom he worked with in **The Wind and The Lion**. Valeria, he would like to have played by Raquel Welch, who seems quite agreeable at this point. And there's a role for a little old man that Millius wants to be played by John Huston—they've worked together before, on **Judge Roy Bean** and **The Wind and The Lion**.

JB: There are a number of other lieutenants and generals and the thief who befriends Conan. Do you have anybody in particular in mind that you'd like to see cast in some of these roles?

BB: Most of the people I would cast in the roles are too old. For instance, the thief who later becomes a general—I could see Charles Bronson, and Thulsa Doom might be Jack Palance.

JB: Sounds close to me.

BB: In fact, as Conan, I would love to see a young Jack Palance. From the moment I read the Conan books, I felt that was the only actor who could play him. He'd be very good, but he's too old for the role.

JB: He could be Conan's father.

BB: Yeah. He's got the perfect face.

JB: Do you have the feeling that when this Conan film is made and released that it will start a trend, like **Star Wars** started a trend of science fiction films?

BB: It will definitely start a trend because it will really be a one-of-a-kind film. It is a film so different from what is on the market that it will take the nation, if not the world, by storm.

JB: Roy Thomas has been called upon as technical consultant. What is his input at this point in time?

BB: When he was called in to be consultant, basically his job was to tag the particular Conan stories for Millius to read that he felt best emphasized the essence of Conan.

JB: Does Millius have any intention of calling him in, say after the script has been completed, and have him go over it to check for inconsistencies within the Howard canon?

BB: Not to my knowledge. There are already inconsistencies because the lead villain, Thulsa Doom, is from the Kull stories.

JB: Why did John do that?

BB: He probably felt that Thulsa Doom was the most colorful, picturesque and visual of Howard's villains. I believe he liked the idea of the snake culture, and wanted to draw upon that. Anyway, Howard himself was not above taking a Kull story like *By This Axe I Rule*, and shuffling it around a little to get the Conan tale, *Phoenix on the Sword*, a couple of years later.

JB: Do you feel that Howard fans will resent Millius taking liberty with the stories by picking up the pieces, characters, aspects of action, and interweaving them all into one epic production?

BB: There's always going to be some fans who are displeased by tampering. When you read books, you always have your own picture of what's going on, your own idea of what Conan looks like. And everyone has a different idea, so you can't please them all. But I think John will please most of the people because he is being very true to the Howard spirit in the Conan books. He is also writing material that fills in between the stories Howard has written. He's filling in time periods that were never written by Howard, and in that way avoiding the corruption of Howard's works.

JB: Do you think that after reading all of the Howard stories yourself, and being so close to the production, and reading Millius' screenplay—that Howard would have approved?

BB: I think Howard would have loved it.●

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It's of little importance just where and when art portfolios by comic artists first got started, but there is no denying that this format, all but unknown ten years ago, is a popular success today. High-quality production and exceptional art have become the standards which most publishers attempt to attain, and for those who have achieved the goal there been spectacular triumphs.

The portfolio industry ostensibly grew out of the poster business generated by Frank Frazetta. Posters had their appeal, but how much wallspace did anybody have? The idea of collecting quality prints, never before seen, on a higher grade of paper, and in a protective folder seemed like a reasonable alternative. All the better if there were only 1000 copies produced, all signed and numbered, like limited edition fine art prints.

THE PORT-FOLIO EXPLO-SION

Frazetta himself was commissioned in 1973 to produce a set of eight drawings in pen and ink, based upon Tolkein's **Lord of the Rings**. A year or so later, the signed and numbered portfolio was a sellout at $15, and now commands well over $100 when it can be found. A **Kubla Khan** folio by Frazetta followed and similarly sold out. The latest Frazetta collection, titled **Women of the Ages**, is also out of print though a few copies are still available from dealers who specialize in portfolios.

With a path now clearly marked, a handful of publishers quickly dove into the portfolio publishing field with all manner of projects; naturally some of them wound up taking a bath. Frazetta is an indisputably commercial artist, and a fan favorite, but there are few artists of his stature in collector's circles. There is also a certain chemistry of artist, subject matter, format and timing involved that is difficult to predict. As a result, projects like Jim Starlin's **Insanity**, Howard Chaykin's **Sherlock Holmes**, Roy Krenkel's **Ancient Cities** and Mike Kaluta's **Dunby's Inferno** did

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not live up to expectations.

Perhaps the first real challenger to the Frazetta mantle was Barry Windsor-Smith, who entered the portfolio field in 1974, fresh with momentum from his **Conan** comic career. **The Four Ages** was his initial portfolio effort, featuring four plates in black-and-white, thirty sets of which were hand-colored and signed. Much more prestigious was **The Tuppenny Conan**, six prints in an illustrated folder, followed by the full-color **Robert E. Howard Memorial Portfolio**, which featured five plates of Howard characters. All sold out within months of their publication, and have currently escalated from five to ten times their original value.

Since then, Windsor-Smith has remained the single biggest creator of portfolios. He is also one of the foremost experimenters in size and format, making each new production distinctive from the last. At the present time, Windsor-Smith has three portfolios in print, each with a different fantasy theme: **Fantastic Islands** is a four plate chronicle of ancient barbarians of the British Isles, **Excalibur** is a miniature (3x5") collection of six drawings based upon the King Arthur legend, and **Sibylla** is a large full-color selection of four paintings of ancient prophetesses in an illustrated folder.

Berni Wrightson's **Edgar Allan Poe** and **Frankenstein** portfolios sold out by their publishing dates. A second **Frankenstein** package is rapidly following suit.

The production standards of most current portfolios are respectably high with prices reasonably moderate — from approximately $10 for black-and-white, to $35 for full-color. The value of the top line folios begins to accrue as soon as they sell out, which often occurs within a year. Many publishers offer a guaranteed buy-back policy for this reason, providing the material is undamaged.

Generally, art portfolios are a sound aesthetic value, as well as being good investment property. Most artists see the format as an opportunity to show their best work without the restrictions of panel breakdowns, censorship or superheroic distortions. They are generally paid better than comic page-rates afford, so the incentive for quality is much higher. The luxury of working on any theme with the highest printing standards often inspires the creation of masterpieces of illustrative detail which are eminently suitable for wall display. Moreover, most portfolio prints are as large as some posters, and the cost per plate is comparable.

Among the top portfolios of the recent past there have been a number of impressive works by comic artists, ranging a broad spectrum of fantasy subjects.

Frank Thorne's **Wizards and Warrior Women** was a particularly appealing selection of six plates in the **Red Sonja** tradition which rapidly sold out of its edition of 1000. **Climaxes**, by Craig Russell, was another handsome collection, utilizing a distinctive, classically inspired pencil technique, which also sold out quickly.

Celtia copyright © 1978 Jim Fitzpatrick

Fantastic Islands copyright © 1978 Barry Windsor-Smith

Choosing a subject close to an artist's heart often results in improbable packages, such as **Wally Wood's Weird Sex-Fantasy**, featuring 12 plates in a gold-embossed slipcase, limited to 2000 copies. On the other hand, a project as seemingly natural as Will Eisner's **Spirit Portfolio** with 12 full-color paintings can have trouble selling 1500 sets.

Sometimes portfolios are used to highlight art which was previously printed as insignificantly small paperback covers, such as the **Neal Adams Tarzan** series of full-color plates. **The Repent Harlequin Portfolio** served a similar purpose by reproducing six of Steranko's most forceful illustrations in black-and-white, giving them a different viewpoint than the 3-D versions which adorned **The Illustrated Harlan Ellison**.

When the artist and the subject are right for each other, the results can be remarkable. Frank Cirocco's Tolkein-esque **Land of Shadows** in full-color sold out of 1000 copies at $20 each, so another series of paintings are being prepared for upcoming release. Alfredo Alcala's **Valor** features some of the most stunningly detailed sword & sorcery artwork ever rendered.

The chiaroscuric imagination of Alex Nino wrenches the optic nerve in **The Dark Suns of Gruagg**, a collection of ten illustrations based on a bizarre legend from the Philippines. John Pound's **Beyond Heaven and Hell** is a necromancer's fantasy-world of beast-men and beautiful women, taking advantage of high-quality printing to work with a full-tonal rendering technique rather than hard-edged inked line art. **Elric of Melnibone** is an intricately pencil-rendered selection of eight unique illustrations by Bob Gould, another portfolio now out of print.

The latest contributors to the portfolio scene have been Bill Stout and Nestor Redondo. Legendary fantasy and finely-crafted linework distinguish both artists' approach to the format. Stout's **Dragonslayers** journeys through time and space to recapture demons and dinosaurs from ancient folk-tales. Redondo celebrates the heroic qualities of larger than life barbarians in **Men, Maiden and Myths**, with ample attention to glistening muscles and statuesque women.

One of the most impressive of the new portfolios comes by way of Ireland, and is titled **Celtia**, by Jim FitzPatrick, who also created the full-color fantasy novel **Book of Conquests**. Utilizing decorative design motifs and details, Fitzpatrick envisions eight Irish gods and goddesses, with a rendering technique similar to that of Barry Windsor-Smith. The entire package is encased in a white leatherette folio cover, gold stamped, and signed on both the cover and the first plate.

The day of the fine art comic portfolio has dawned, and the intrinsic value of the form escalates every day. Even if the comic books themselves have begun to stagnate and turn into self-parodies, comic art and its artists are continuing to expand their potential.●

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CONAN
THE LEGEND OF THE MOST SAVAGE BARBARIAN OF ALL TIME BEGAN WITH THE
ENIGMA OF STEEL!

CONAN THE FILM PART TWO: AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH ART DIRECTOR RON COBB

EISENBANDS: You've been spending a great deal of time and effort in film production lately, most notably on Alien. How did the Conan project come about for you?

RON COBB: That's a difficult question. Toward the end of last year when I had just returned from England, John contacted me because he wanted me to work on **Half the Sky**, his mountain man film.

I said 'Fine. I'd love to help you develop a film. But I just got back from a year on Alien; I've got to take some time off to sit around and do nothing for a couple of weeks. Well, that was OK. John had to go to Europe, so he said we'd talk about it when he got back.

While he was gone, Bob Greenberg called and said "We're producing Conan" And Ed Pressman would like to talk to you about doing something on it." I had to tell him "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm just taking some time off until John gets back, and then I'm going to work on his movie. John's been waiting for me throughout Alien to work on one of his pictures. I'm pretty well obligated now. In fact John had even postponed **Half the Sky**, because he was marking time until I was free. And they said, 'Oh that's too bad. We'd really like to try you on some things. Could you do just some temporary stuff?"

JS: Was this during the period when Oliver Stone was still the writer?

RC: Yes. Stone was working on the script. I said "Give me a week off and I'll give it a try."

JS: Did you know the Conan material?

RC: Not too well. But I said, "I'll probably do some drawings for you, some illustrations, whatever. I'd be interested in having a hand in the project. It sounds like I'd have a lot of freedom." So I took a little time off and then went to Pressman and said "You realize the moment John gets back I just might have to quit on you." He agreed, and started doing production drawings, read the screenplay and saw possibilities in it.

I started feeding my sketches and drawings in, finding my way through it, skim-reading a few Conan novels on the side, refreshing my memory on it. I did the Thulsa Doom art and they just went crazy about it. They asked me to do more and more, so just kept working.

It was a month or so before I finally got a call from John. I said, "I'm right in the middle of a painting job for Conan. He said "You're what?" I told John that I couldn't resist the work, but they knew I'd have to quit when the call came. Then John got real nervous. He didn't know whether I was asking for more money or what. It was all very embarrassing. So I told him, "Let me just finish this painting." So I wrapped up the crucifixion scene I was working on and went straight over to the mountain man movie.

I started to research a series of paintings, with Indians and mountain men. All the while, in the background, Conan was percolating away, and they were still looking for a director. At one point, Oliver was going to direct it himself. Then, one day John started asking questions about Conan. "What are they doing over there?" He was obviously curious about the Conan project.

I showed him some of the paintings I'd done, and he asked some more questions. I told Bob Greenberg, "You know, John's really interested in Conan." Bob said that John was always the first choice, but he'd been working on **Big Wednesday** and wasn't available, and now they'd heard he was tied up with this mountain man film. When I asked John about it he said they'd screwed around, waited too long, kind of put down the whole idea as something he really didn't want to be a part of. Time passed, and finally he began to get slowed up and slower on **Half the Sky**, and gradually began to lose interest in it.

JS: Was he working on the script at that time?

RC: Yeah, and I was painting away. Quite a few months went by, well into March of this year, when John suddenly said that he wanted to see Oliver's script. So I called Pressman and said, "John would like to see a Conan script. I don't know what he's got in mind." Like a shot they're over with the script and asking for suggestions.

John went into his office and looked at it for about two hours. Then he comes out and says, "Nobody can make this film but me. get Ed Pressman on the phone! It just isn't right for anyone else to direct this—no one understands Conan like I do!"

I thought, "Here we go."

So he called Pressman, and they started going round and round. Finally somebody just said "All right, talk to Dino." Pressman still wanted Millius, but he was on the verge of going to England to talk to Ridley Scott.

JS: But what happened to Oliver Stone?

RC: Well, the idea was that John would shoot Oliver's script, but John's never directed a film that he hasn't written, and he wanted to make some changes, like scrapping an army of mutants. So he met with Oliver. I think he knew him from before. They're really a strange pair because John's son of a romantic proto-fascist and Oliver's kind of a burned-out hippie. And they were, ha-ha, going to work together and revise the script.

It didn't take long before Oliver was saying, 'He's crazy. He's out of his mind! I don't want anything to do with this!' They were screaming at each other on the phone, and then it all collapsed. So John just went ahead and bloody well rewrote the whole thing. He just made it his project, and everything's been moving from that point on. There are lots of details that I can't recall right now and probably have a few things wrong, but that's roughly what happened.

JS: Well, at least you had a good head start on the film.

RC: Yeah, that's the funny part. I'm back on Conan, with Ed Pressman and everybody else. What's really funny though, is what happened to **Half the Sky** along the way—John was turning his mountain man movie into Conan. He really was. He had sabre-toothed tigers, and Jedediah Smith coming over the Rockies and finding the Abominable Snowman—the Yeti—waiting at him, like a Disneyland ride. He was aching to put all these elements in. And, as it is, he really succeeded.

If you read **Half the Sky**, you'd see that it's like sword and sorcery. It's bizarre. Images, signs, strange flaming heads, sorcery, medicine men, delusions in the desert mountains that are twelve times higher than the Rockies. I was painting these Wagnerian landscapes of the Rocky Mountains. I think it was in March that we made the actual changeover. I finished the last six paintings for **Half the Sky**, and started on Conan. I just picked up where I left off, except this time, John wanted me to start painting more of my interpretation of Conan. We talked about it, and agreed that we wanted a departure from the Frazetta image, and even the comics image. Not a big departure, but we wanted to give it a different look.

JS: In what way?

RC: I don't know if John would describe it this way but I see it as more historical, as though this were a true and believable time in history. You get the feeling—from the Frazetta paintings, the Howard stories, and the comics—that these are all fantasy extrapolations. The movie's going to be what the stories are based on. The sense of your seeing the real Hyborian world is the most important aspect. Suddenly everything is no longer fantasy elaborations on history but the precursor of history. We wanted to give it that look combined with an alien visual texture.

JS: Howard used a lot of magic and supernatural fantasy in his tales. Why did John decide not to capitalize on that like Korda did in **Thief of Bagdad**, for example?

RC: I can't exactly speak for John but I do know that Conan is not going to be devoid of magic. It's just that there's a style to the magic that you might say is in the manner of the paranormal. It's inexplicable, but it could also be someone meddling with your mind.

Thulsa Doom makes a gesture and a snake comes out of his hand. It'll be handled so that the audience will ask "Did he really make a snake come out of his hand, or did he make you think a snake came out of his hand?" Every so often there'll be out and out magical things, like someone seeming to control the weather, and there'll be miraculous transformations and disembodied spirits. There's even a quality of the dead coming back to life, stuff like that. But it's not a Ray Harryhausen movie, there's not a lot of bizarre things going on. The sorcery is all relevant to the story and at times awesome. For the battle scene at the end, there are really amazing things.

There was a shotgun-like device, for example, in which a

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California-based Ron Cobb has evolved the simple art of cartooning into a high art form. From his early work at the Disney Studios to his award-winning science fiction book cover paintings, Cobb's art is always unmistakably his own. He is known world-wide for his strange but inventive sense of humor. More recently he has turned his talents to accepting the challenge of designing many of the sets used for the film Alien. Several volumes of Cobb cartoons have already been published, and a new book of paintings and other illustrations—including those from Alien and Conan—will be released later this year. Steranko interviewed Cobb at John Milius' production headquarters in Burbank on August 18, 979.

mystical explosive chemical like gunpowder was going to be exploited as a sort of scientific magic, though I don't think John wants to use that sort of thing specifically. It's probably a little too cute, so you might not get to see it in the film. But John is constantly changing details like these.

His approach to magic is strange but real—like he's portraying Thulsa Doom now as a Jim Jones type of villain: one who messes with your mind, who uses sex play. He's definitely an erotic character. That's why John wants Sean Connery for the part. He doesn't want Doom to be ugly, but kind of strangely handsome. Doom seduces and beguiles women sexually and his whole cult in the mountains is based to a certain extent on his sensuality as well as his persuasiveness—a bit of everyday Charlie Manson type. If you think awhile, the reality of these cults is sort of supernatural. And really quite terrifying.

JS: Just looking around this room at your work, it seems like you're making an extensive use of symbols.

RC: Yes, I think it's really important for imagery to be established—the power of visual organization.

JS: This may be a trick question, but I'll ask it anyway: Is Milius Conan?

RC: Milius is very much Conan. I think that's the way he feels. That's the point he can do Conan with conviction, because he is Hollywood's barbarian.

JS: With all the things I know about John, this seems to be the ultimate Milius film. **Dillinger** and **Judge Roy Bean** had some historical basis in fact, which John turned inside out. But on this film he's got a completely unknown era in which to create his definitive Milius character study.

RC: Yes. He couldn't go wrong with this film.

JS: What's been going on in here offices? The walls and doors are hacked to pieces. It looks like there's been a war going on. More of the Milius touch?

RC: Yeah, that's what Conan will do to you after awhile.

See that door with the inch-deep slice in it? That was John. He just got worked up one day and took a swing at it with a broadsword. Want to hear some stories about swordmakers—well we've got 'em.

One of the guys we had in to bid on making Conan's sword was really wild. He was telling us that there's this group, a cult, that will kill for a real sword. "Indeed," I said. "That's an odd remark. What's the big deal about a real sword?" So he pointed out, and rightly so, that there aren't many real swords in the world, with fine blades, all sharpened to a razor edge, ones that will hold their edges. They're certainly not being made anymore, except by Wilkinson who makes ceremonial swords in England. But it's difficult to make a fine sword, so there are fewer and fewer of them.

He claimed there's a group that will kill anyone ipsilaterally enough to make a real sword, because this group believes that swords contain inscrutable powers. It's a cult, and they worship swords. He warned, "What you'll have to do on the production if I make you a real sword, is have a guard on the blade, because they'll come in the night, and they'll kill anyone there and had visions of this hooded figure—whoooooo—making off with the sword! A stupid movie sword."

And John was going, "Oh really? I've never heard of this group."

"They go anywhere in the world," the swordmaker was going on. "Anywhere they smell a sword, they'll come for it." Ridiculous idea! And we said "Thank you very much, we'll certainly keep that in mind," and he left.

Another guy came in every once in a while to show John some cutlery. One day he comes into the art room and points at one of the walls and says, "Is there anybody in the office on the other side?" And at the time there wasn't, so he just puts back his arm, whips out a hunting dagger and hurls about four inches of the blade through the wall so that it's poking out the other side. And that's not even unusual around here. We almost have to wave a white flag before passing open doors because you never know what's going to come flying out. And John's probably the worst when it comes to playing with all these dangerous weapons. The whole building may be chopped to pieces before we're finished filming.

John really freaked out this one swordmaker—maybe for life.

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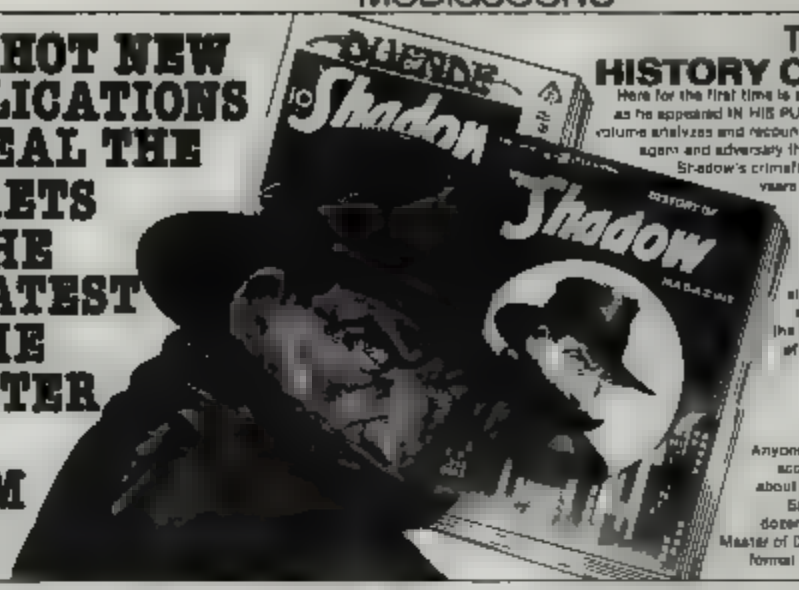

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BY NESTOR REDONDO AND WILLIAM STOUT

He came in with a few samples to show around, and one was this really gorgeous longsword. Man, it was beautiful and worth a couple of thousand dollars. Well, John saw it and immediately said "I've got to try this out!" So we all formed a parade and marched out into the parking lot where there are these big wooden dividers - something like telephone poles. And John hauls off with a massive two-fisted swing, putting all his weight into it, and *CLAAAANG*. The blade just snapped off right at the handle. The poor swordmaker went into shock and John's just standing there with the ruins of the guy's expensive, hand-made sword in his hat. What could John do, really? So he just turned around kinda slow and said to the guy "Gee, I'm sorry."

There were a few other crazy guys in and by the time we had gone through five or six of these, we just had the impression that they were all mad. We simply couldn't find anyone on the face of the earth who could make a sword that wasn't bananas.

JS: What made you select the blademaker who's making Conan's sword now?

RC: Because he hasn't told us any weird stories yet. We were amazed! And he lived in Burbank. He's doing a beautiful job - go over there and check it out every once in awhile. He's a little slow but it's coming. He ordered the steel cut out the blade, started grinding and forging it. There is also an elk-head hilt sculpted out of wax. At first it wasn't right so we made some extra drawings, contours, cross-sections, and believe me, it's looking perfect. When the sword's completed, it will be engraved on both sides, blue steel, bronze head, leather handle. The inscription reads, "Suffer No Guilt Yee Who Wield This In The Name of Crom."

JS: Will it be used? Will Milius let it be dented and nicked?

RC: No, because John basically wanted a real sword for two purposes. One is for close-ups. The only way to get the inscription to look very authentic is to chisel it in real steel. It'll glint and it will have all the ring and feel of a real broadsword. But that's all. Everything else will be aluminum or fiberglass copies, and most of the fights will be with plain fake swords.

The other use of course, is John wants something to put on the wall.

JS: But not necessarily in that order. Does the sword have a name?

RC: It should, I couldn't tell you. It doesn't. And then there's the Atlantean sword, which is supposedly started now.

JS: Just take a random guess, considering all of the time spent in design how much is this sword going to cost?

RC: That's very difficult to determine. The guy actually making it minus the engraving, is charging us $700. Then, there's my time, and of course a lot of time with the people who didn't make it - phone calls and gigs. It's hard to say. The guy first assigned to the job was going to do it for $2000, and he wasn't even going to make the

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gal's head, just the blade. We were delighted to find a guy who seemed like he was actually going to do it, and were doubly delighted when he said "Well, I think... can do it for $400." He also wants screen credit, which is wise for him. John seems very agreeable about it. Blades by, covers by, sure, why not.

JS: What about the armor?

RC: No one, for the longest time, was lined up for that. Now there seems to be someone in Rome, but he's one of Dino's regular armorers. Sounds kind of ominous in the meantime, we do have someone here who's going to do mock-ups of the armor.

JS: There's nothing ready yet?

RC: Well, there are a few drawings. When the script's finished, we supposedly shift gears and then everything will be very resolute. Designs will go straight into mock-ups, and then right into production. To a certain extent John's very picky about the look of the film. He has to be on hand for design approval. I can't drag him away from his writing at this stage.

JS: Isn't that your function?

RC: Well, it would be, but I choose to discuss it all with John. Essentially I have the same approach to the film as he does, and that is I cannot help but see the film as a whole, so I'm designing it as though I were directing it. And each time I design a certain device, it's with a sense of the entire film on each side of it. Naturally the movie in my head is not going to be John's movie. So I have to keep modifying my stuff as it works for him, because that's the movie that's going to be made. I'll be making many of the decisions, and he likes most of the decisions I make. But he does want to be consulted with. To a certain extent, there's always a slight difference of interpretation between us. So I just have to be flexible.

JS: Does he have a strong visual sense?

RC: Yes, that's the point, he's a very strong visual director. Every modification, every objection he's had to something I've done, is never arbitrary. It's usually an excellent observation. I almost always find it to be a superior concept.

JS: I understand that Akira Kurosawa was one of John's early influences. What other film-makers have made an impression on Milius and will have an impact on Conan?

RC: He draws from many different directions. Sergei Eisenstein's Alexander Nevsky is one that specifically stands out. From Kurosawa, Seven Samurai's a standard, along with Yojimbo and Throne of Blood; he's drawn on them all. We've even screened a number of them recently.

I think what appeals to John most is the composition, the moods and the tension those films created. He really soaks up the flavor. The look of those films, not just the violence per se. And Kurosawa, of course, created a mood, a conviction, a believability, a wholeness to the portrayal of medieval Japan that we would really like to capture - that ability to have everything tightly knit together.

JS: This business of swords and armor is almost the opposite of what you have been doing for Alien.

RC: I don't know. Actually, it isn't that difficult. The part that is a challenge for me is the art that involves a lot of figure drawing, and I'm really not that good at it. It's really a labor for me, and takes double the amount of time for me to put a figure together than it would to assemble a piece of architecture. But, other than that, the basic design job of solving the problem and putting it into the style of a time, a period, a culture is fun. And the one thing that I find the most stimulating, and in a way the easiest to handle, is that there are no precedents. In science fiction, I have the future to work with, so I'm not restricted in this particular case. There's no restriction either because there are no historic requirements, it's really an imaginary culture. If I had to historically create an accurate era, I could probably do that too, but I wouldn't find it as exciting.

JS: What is your design sensibility on Conan? What are the basic overriding principles that you are applying to this?

RC: To a certain extent we'll have to borrow. We can't afford to create all the props, not every doorknob, so many preconstructed things will apply. But when we get down to key pieces and costumes, I, perhaps more than John, would really like to

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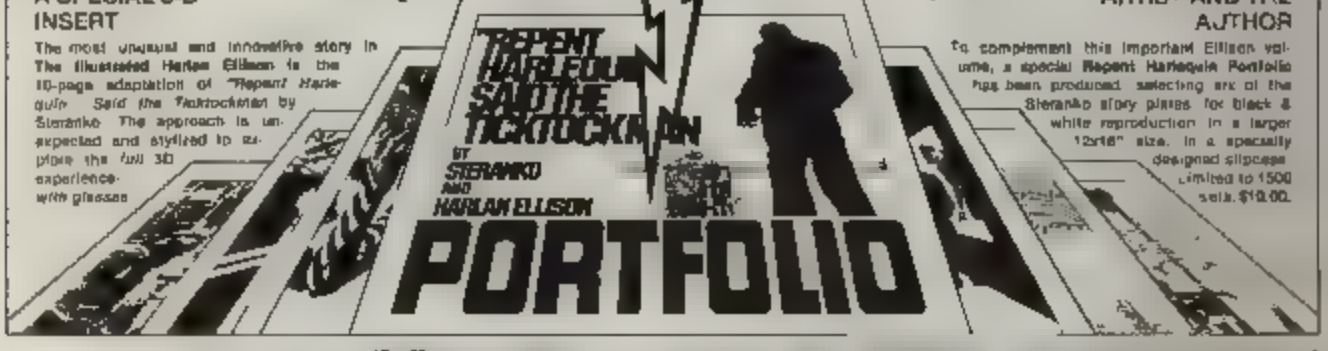

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To complement this important Ellison volume, a special **Repent Harlequin Portfolio** has been produced, selecting six of the Steranko story plates for black & white reproduction in a larger 12x18" size. In a specially designed slipcase limited to 1500 sets. $10.00.

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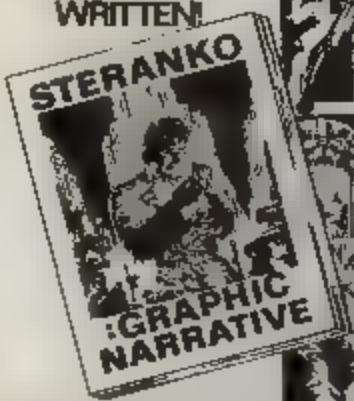


Steranko's influence and impact on the comic art field has long been recognized by fans, artists and scholars, but has never been studied or analyzed in depth to determine exactly why and how one writer-artist could revolutionize and revitalize an entire industry with just 30 published stories in less than three years. In conjunction with the Canada Council, The Winnipeg Art Gallery has established a comprehensive travelling exhibition devoted to the comic art of Steranko, which will be on display throughout Canada, beginning June 1975 in Winnipeg. The show is the only one of its kind in the world, featuring over 200 pieces of original art from Steranko's personal collection, all carefully matted and framed for gallery display. Preparation took over a year-and-a-half and involved frequent consultation and interviews with the artist culminating in a singular showcase of visual and conceptual dimensions in pursuit of a definitive exhibition book to accompany the art, the show's curators, Philip Fry and Ted Poulos, have assembled and written a highly illustrated book that combines a year-and-a-half of research and analysis. The result is a host of new, incisive conclusions and observations about the artist, his work and his perceptions of the comic form. The book itself is nearly a half-inch thick, 8½x11" in size and contains almost 30,000 words of sharply defined analysis, profusely illustrated with art from the comics, Steranko's files and several rare and unpublished pieces, all packed into 120 pages on heavy stock, simply titled **Steranko: Graphic Narrative**. The essence of this book is its brilliant explanatory text, which explores Steranko's unique ability to grasp and manipulate such abstract and subtle storytelling devices as two-dimensional space and time, panel size and design, angles and lighting, characters and props, color and layout, composition and sequential effects, balloons and backgrounds, cover-splash, interior page concepts and cliff-hanging endings, cinematic technique and camera angles. **Steranko: Graphic Narrative** is almost a textbook on his approach to comics and their possibilities and the only truly scholarly study of the comic form in existence. **Steranko: Graphic Narrative** is available now for $8.50.

simplistic a culture with the artifacts, meaning that they'll have a similar look. When the Vanirs appear you should immediately recognize them; as you watch the film you should recognize the imagery of their culture. Even their cups should be locally distinctive, as opposed to a Cimmerian cup. There should be design keys that would be repeated. There'd be the use of lacquered leather or furs on a consistent basis, so it looks like a real culture. And maybe even a race of people could have a way of holding their bodies and moving. It'd be nice. Once you get to know this culture, you would understand that it soaks through the people, from top to the bottom, that everything they do is an indicator of who or what they are. It would give a really high impact of believability to the film.

JS: Tell us about the paintings. You're illustrating key scenes from the film to establish the character of the film itself. How many of these paintings will you do?

RC: I'll do as many as the tranquil period on the film permits. Obviously, when we get down to production we won't have time for paintings. At least I won't because I won't look either. So what I'll do is probably switch techniques, like I did on **Alien**, I'll just start knocking out drawings that have as much clarity as possible—of artifacts, props, sets. If I work like I did on **Alien**, I'll probably do what I call sketch planning. It's a really interesting way for me to work. It's like doing a mechanical drawing of a set on graph paper. Many of the sets I did on **Alien** were worked out almost entirely on sketch plans, and they're accurate enough so that the draftsmen can literally trace over and refine them for the construction workers. I think that it's a very valuable way of extending my control into important areas of proportion and size.

JS: Your position on Conan is as art director. Doesn't that create problems with the union?

RC: I'm not completely sure; it may turn out to be a problem before we're done on **Conan**. I might not be art director in the final credits. I was the concept artist on **Alien**, mostly because there's no concept artists' union. It's a problem I can leave up to John; whatever designation he decides on, I'll accept.

JS: Is John's concept of Conan, and the film itself close to what you would do if you were director?

RC: Not exactly. But I do have input. My impressions are that John is amazingly visual in his directing style and that he knows very clearly what he wants. He'll make use of much that I've done, but he won't take everything. I expect that, and I like it because we have a good interplay of ideas. I feed him my thoughts, and he really gives me a good sense of what he wants. At times I am not quite sure how I want to handle something, but he always has excellent observations and he can generate excitement.

He's very fair. In recognizing and admitting when he does see something of mine that he likes. We have a real give and take system of working.

JS: Would you say that 50% of the film is battle scenes?

RC: Of one sort or another. But often it will be implied action, because there's a lot of tension and intrigue. The battle scenes that have been structured are massive and sweeping, but John wants an emphasis on Conan as a strategist, working out logistics, luring armies into death-traps. At this stage, he is blocking out the battles and the tactics are very important. Conan and his freebooters and his Zamoran army are all outnumbered so he has to be very clever. It's touch and go there.

JS: Can you explain the Milius concept of Conan?

RC: I think Conan pretty much represents a lashing out at the civilized world. This is very much in John's make-up. He's very disillusioned with civilization, and inherently believes that all civilizations are corrupt. He romantically sees destructive rage as dignified and correct. He expects everything to collapse, anyhow. And in Conan, he can vent these feelings.

He admires people who are fed up and take action to tear society down, so the character of Conan really appeals to him. He values friendship and honor very highly and a lot of old-fashioned virtues like that. He imagines them as being embodied in Conan—toward his friends, toward his equals, he's honorable. Fair and loyal. But toward the decadent and the effete, he puts them in their place.

Conan's an outlet for John's barbary aggressions, and the film provides an opportunity to make a specific allegory to our society.

One of the main things he's drawing on very heavily is the more eccentric aspect of the 60s—flower children, hippies, drugs.

John has people in gauze-draped processions, dancing around, going to the mountain of power for great pleasure orgies, which generally end up in a grim way. He's had several people write pieces for him on strange cults.

John draws parallels that demonstrate what a dead end these cults really are. Conan, and a dethroned king who was once like Conan, keeps lamenting how the youth of his kingdom are worthless, they're so easily swayed to run off with this silly snake cult. He keeps asking about what happened to the youth that used to stand up and question and assert their own dignity and all that. Conan [illegible] John III sorts of [illegible] is to tell all the world about, our world, specifically.

He tried to do that in **Apocalypse Now** and **Big Wednesday** and **The Wind and The Lion**, but these things don't always come off because they look a bit like parody and are a little overmelodramatic. In the context of a contemporary setting in Conan, it will probably work better. And John's just ecstatic about it. He's diving in head first.

JS: John appears to have no hesitation in showing the Robert E. Howard kind of violence on screen at all.

RC: Oh, I don't know. I think when he gets right down to it, that he's somehow very suspicious of explicit violence. He sees it almost as a fad. And perhaps he wants to defy it. I think he's striving for certain aspects of older filmmaking styles, where the violence is not explicit or gory like blood being splattered across the screen but is implied with great strength and revulsion, but without actually showing it. I think he is quite taken with the restrained version of Kurosawa and some of the Samurai films, where you see violence, but it's very stylized—a sword and someone spinning away so that there's a graphic sense that someone's been gutted, but you don't actually see it. I think that appeals to him. I think he'd like to discipline himself and concentrate on the aesthetic choreography of the violence, so that it looks amazingly convincing, but stopping short of actually spelling it out. I know the script isn't that way. It is unusually graphic, but as he gets closer to doing the film, he'll probably pull back. **The Wind and the Lion** script contained a tremendous amount of gore, but he eventually decided to restrain himself. He finally did a very old-fashioned thing: he showed people reacting. I wouldn't be surprised if Conan would end up with that kind of style. A rather old-fashioned defiance of the text.

JS: Well, it's always much more effective to manipulate the mind, and ultimately more powerful.

RC: Sure. Especially if the look of the film around the violence is extra good. You can really pump a great deal of tension into the buildup of that one illusion and almost extract the actual images.

JS: I noticed on the wall a chart that breaks down the entire personnel of this film—generals, corporals, sergents, on down the line. Is that the way it's going to be?

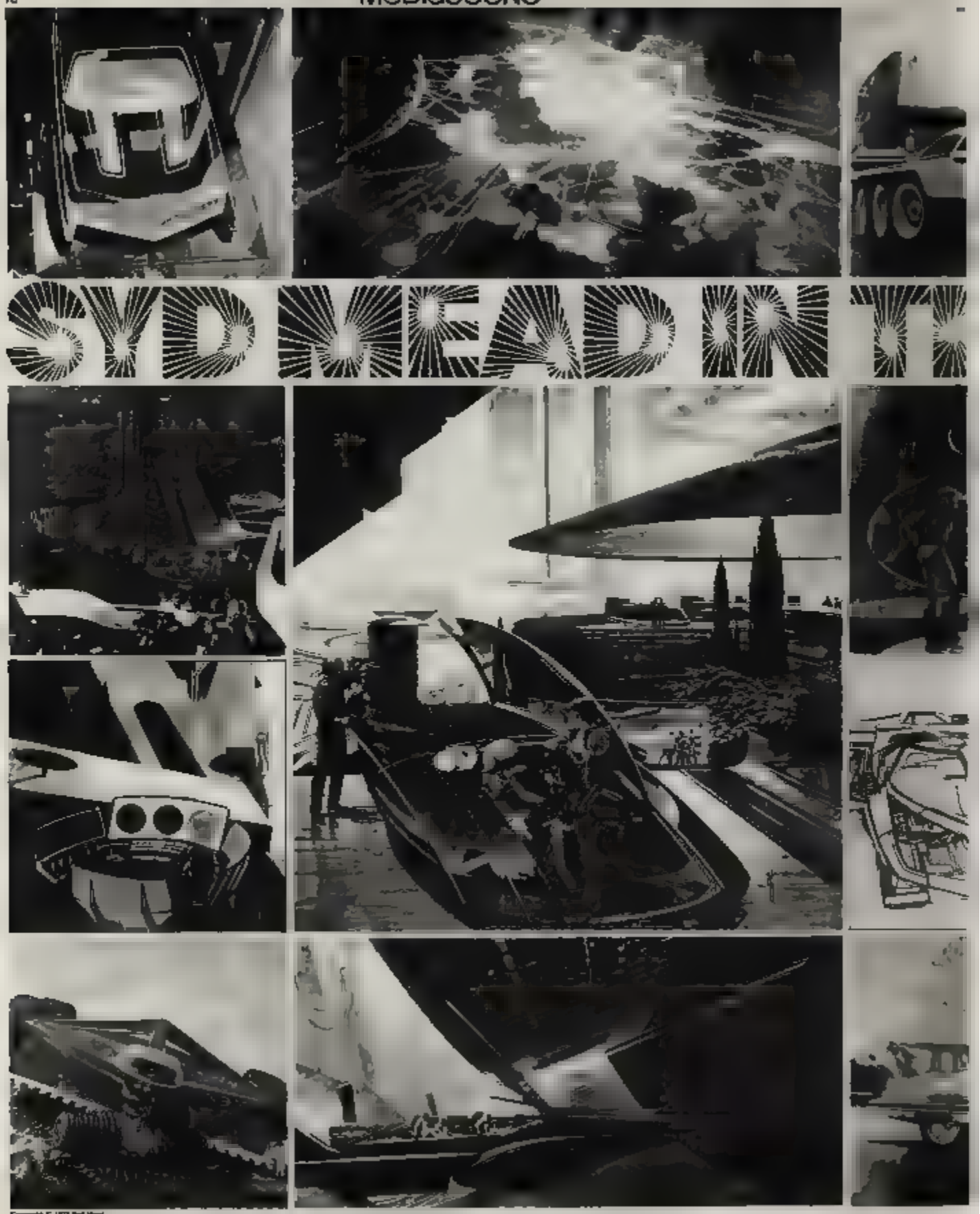
RC: Oh, I'm sure. That's the way John likes to work. He's a wonderful, many-sided person, who likes to hold things down to one idea, one vision, and he puts it in military terms because he admires that approach and sees it as very efficient. To what extent this will actually work, I don't know. I've heard he always tries to run his films like an army operation in combat. Even his company's name is martial—an A-Team is a forward combat infantry unit of specialists, like the commandoes or the Green Berets.

JS: I didn't know if that was done jokingly or seriously.

RC: I'm not sure. I don't know either.

JS: Is John considering the possibility of more Conan films after this one?

RC: Very much so. It gives him an arena to express himself, a place to get everything off his chest. John has said quite a few times now, that he intends to work on Conan sequels for the rest of his life.●



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21ST CENTURY

Despite all evidence to the contrary Syd Mead is not a science-fiction artist.

He is, however a visual designer who lives, breathes and paints the world of the 21st century. For twenty years he has been visualizing the future incorporating the fullest potential of advanced technology so that every idea he envisions could conceivably work—and probably will, someday.

The seductive glisten of gleaming chrome, polished metal and sparkling glass give his machinery trucks cars, trains planes and hovercraft a wonderfully fascinating intensity and appeal. The designs themselves are similarly entrancing in their streamlined construction and singularly dramatic configurations. Additional impact is created by the juxtaposition of compact assemblies of futuristic man-made craft against sweeping vistas of open space and prehistorically rugged landscapes to establish a powerful imagery of science vs. nature.

The element of fantasy that permeates Mead's work is a physical solidly scientific extension of reality down to the last detail even such background decorations as animals are mutated and biologically reformed into conceivable creations that tickle the imagination. No matter how radical or unusual the concept it always conforms to the laws of physics, is balanced in weight, constructed to accomodate the human form, mechanically precision crafted, exciting to look at and probably works too. Mead is a unique combination of artist, engineer and spontaneous creator allowing him to turn even his wildest dreams to practical use.

Stylistically Syd Mead is perhaps the leading exponent of the Art Center School of Los Angeles, which flourished in the 50s by teaching not only how to draw a wide variety of subjects in a clearly precise fashion for use in virtually any medium, but also encouraged a spontaneity of stylistic technique by systematizing approaches to color composition and detail. This method allowed the artist to quickly assemble the elements of his painting with almost scientific directness, freeing him to concentrate on the problems involved in rendering the primary subject being illustrated. The trend that resulted from the School's training dominated automobile advertising throughout the 60s.

Science-fiction artists Robert McCall and Ralph McQuarrie are also disciples of the Art Center as evidenced by their bold, flat colors, dynamic perspectives and arresting method of composition but they chose to work in a somewhat casual technique that is almost impressionistic at times. Mead starts from the same fundamental school of thought, but has carried it in an entirely different direction.

Because of the highly advanced content he wished to display and the practical requirements of his clients, Mead has developed a style that is not photographic but romantically realistic in flavor. Reflections and shadows follow the contours of forms according to their metallic compositions and colors as well as directional lighting. There is a simple, easy to read casualness to his arrangement of elements that is really a carefully calculated aspect of his art. His applies meticulous discipline to the placement of every brush-stroke yet never allows the overall effect to become stiff or schematic. In fact Mead is one of the great experimenters in combining mixed media to arrive at totally unpredictable color spacial effects. Then painting precision illustrations with and around them, always coming up with intriguing new concepts of remarkable visual appeal.

Mead studied at the Art Center School between 1958 and 1959, and immediately thereafter joined the Design Staff of the Ford Motor Company which is why automotive concepts dominate his work and a strong engineering background is so important. Soon he began producing presentation material regularly for US Steel, Chrysler Aicoa, Colorado and NASA promotional campaigns.

Most of this work was prepared primarily for inter-industry utilization so very little received wide public exposure in a real sense. Mead was the visionary prophet for several of America's major industries, and has been sought after constantly. His paintings show that the companies they represent are actively reaching for the world of tomorrow, full of modern ideas and exciting new concepts for the future.

After an early flirtation with conventional car shapes (including a 50s-fashion finned design that looked like a hybrid '58 T-Bird and the Batmobile), Mead began to discover his own personalized concepts of design. Passenger vehicles economized on construction materials and wind resistance by reclining the passengers and making the auto extremely thin, utilizing broad planes of sheet metal and gently sloped forms for simplicity. Designs hugged the ground for improved traction and handling, aerodynamically stripped clean of clutter like grills and mirrors, with shaped bubble canopies for 360 degree vision. They were made to slice cleanly through the air barely touching the ground if they did at all.

Circular elliptical and modified curve forms also began to appear but found a more receptive home in airplane and spacecraft configurations. Architecture became Mead's most simplistic area of form/function design concepts: simple cubes, hexagons, cones and combinations of basic geometric forms on a mammoth scale often provided the backdrop for his more organically active machinery.

Not only are Mead's concepts from the year 2000, but so are the people with which he lends his art warmth, scale and identification: they dress in exotic flowing gowns and form-fitting military cut tunics. And it is usually in these non-mechanical set-dressings that the emotionally fantastic side of his work appears. Small bizarre creatures pop-up for decoration: one idea based upon a dog with a cobra-like hooded head actually grows throughout a series of paintings, eventually becoming a horse-sized creature used as a racetrack and as a stylized sculpture motif.

There are occasionally elaborately clothed aliens (to spare Earthlings the shock of their appearance) and astronauts in sphere-shaped pressure suits that look like walking eye-balls. Outrageously large tree-trunks and towering mesas and escarpments with pink and orange skies suggest barbaric unearthly worlds where science has carved a home in the wilderness. Outer space concept drawings for US Steel have even explored totally abstract painted splashes of colors in combination with fully-rendered satellites to heighten emotional impact on an unconscious level.

Mead has been a highly successful, if popularly overlooked, artist since his earliest days at Ford, and those who have seen his work have been influenced both directly and indirectly by his unique imagery. The famous Luke Skywalker landspeeder can be traced back to any number of Mead designs of the 60s, and even Darth Vader's unique TIE fighter has its prototypical origins in a 1961 steel promotional concept.

The age of Star Wars has literally brought Mead out of the industrial shadows, resulting in fantasy poster commissions and gallery showings in the States and overseas. He is also receiving increased exposure in magazines like Playboy, and an examination of his work in a new full-color volume titled Sentinel, featuring over 150 pages of his paintings.

The crystal clarity of his art, combined with the ever-present aura of futuristic imagery, have always made Mead a visionary decades ahead of his own time. Now he is emerging as one of the "great unknowns" of the 60s and 70s, all of which still doesn't make him a science-fiction artist. He's simply an exceptionally talented commercial designer with a window into the 21st century creating the look of tomorrow, today.●

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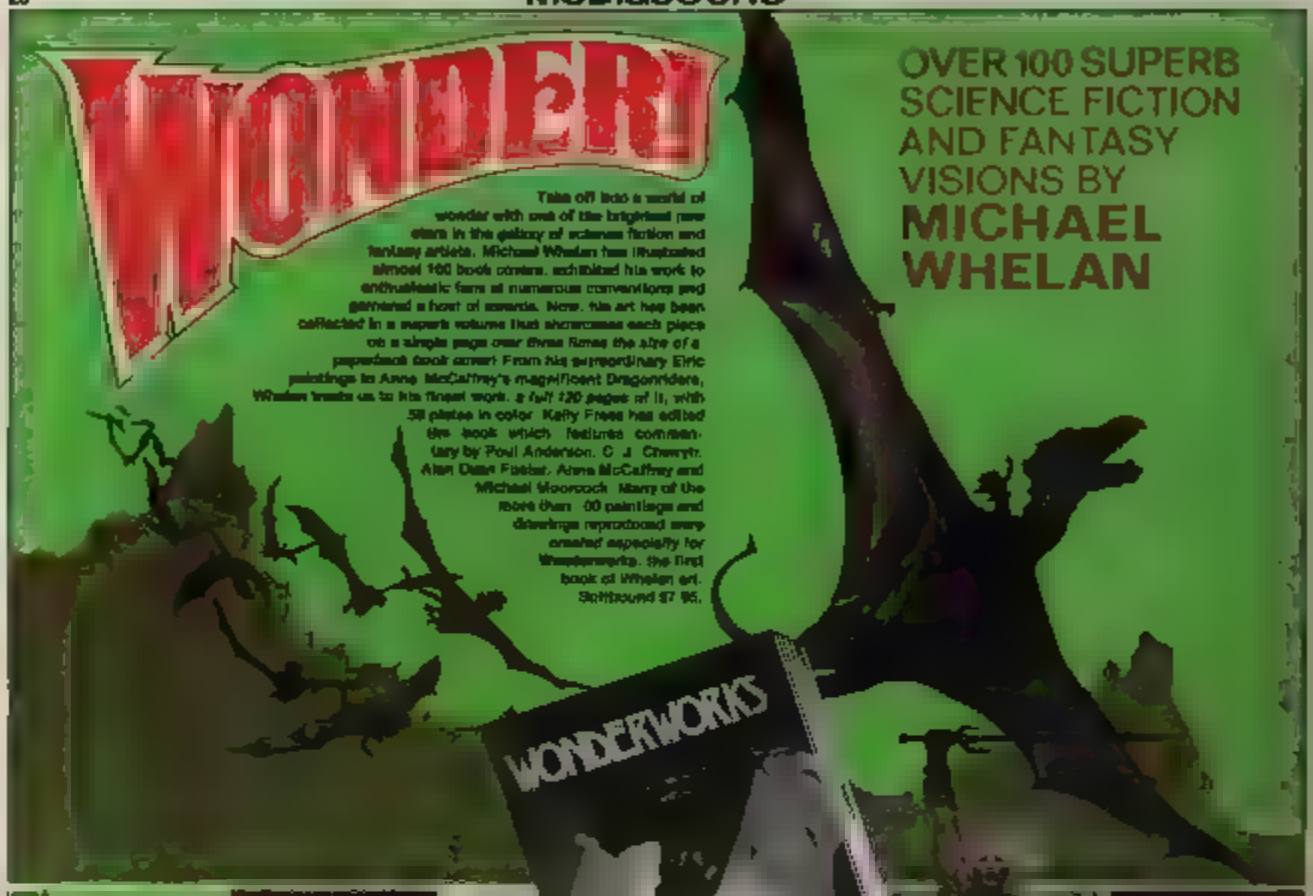

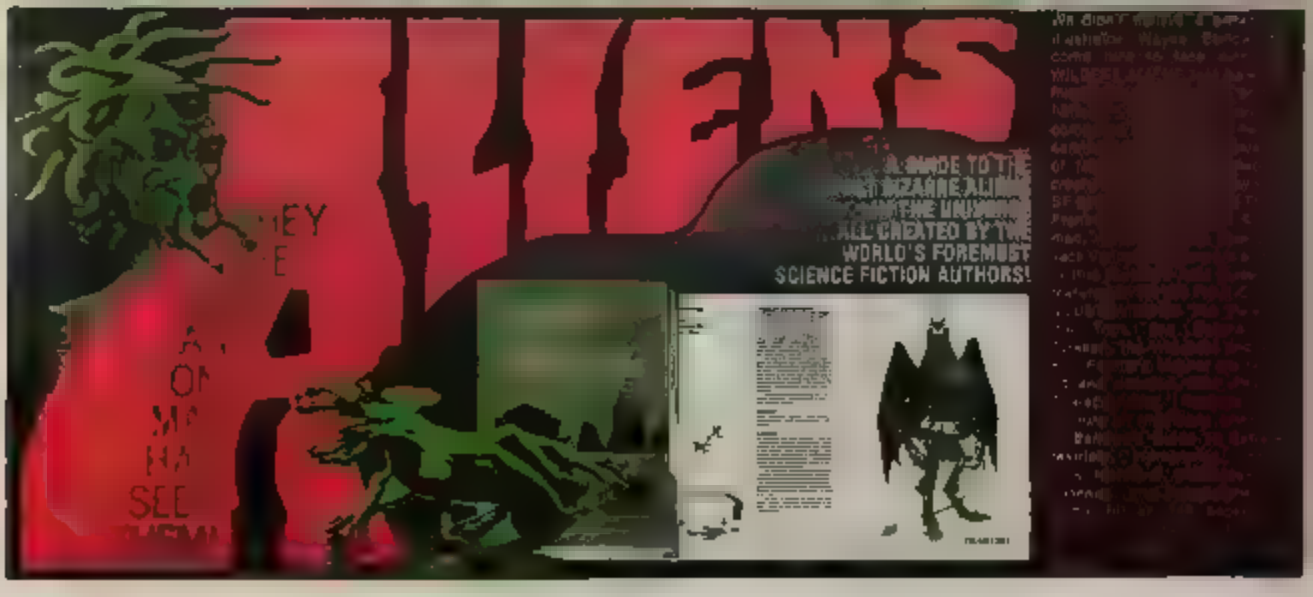

MEDIASCENE

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CHILDHOOD'S

CLARKE'S CLASSIC BEGINS ITS TRANSITIO

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END

N TO THE SCREEN

KARELLAN: *Tremendous changes are upon you, Dick Stormgren. You have killed one another and raped your planet quite freely now for several millenia. This is understandable. Your race is young and given to making mistakes. But, allowed to continue unchecked, your own history would lead you inevitably to self-destruction. We have come to prevent this.*

They are the Overlords, an apparently benevolent alien race of prime movers who have appeared in the skies above Earth just as mankind prepares to rocket into the heavens to explore the mysteries of the universe. Their ships, miles long, hover motionlessly over the world's greatest cities. For the next fifty years, their gifts will transform the planet into a technological utopia, with civilization working only if it wants to, of what it wants to. There is no lack of material goods, transportation or medicine.

KARELLAN: *We will help you accomplish your noblest ideals: true peace on Earth, equality among men, an end to hunger, disease, poverty and much of human suffering.*

The Overlords, who have never revealed themselves physically have but a single stipulation: *The stars are not for man. The universe is a living thing. Our galaxy is an ascending part of the universe. Life seeks out life. You may think of us as teachers. We will protect you, from yourselves if necessary, until all of you are ready to determine what your role is to be in the universe. When you have no further need of us, we will leave you.*

Secretary General of the United Nations Rikki Stormgren answers for mankind. *Only one thing disturbs me: that we seem to have no choice in the matter.*

This is the premise upon which the opening chapters of Arthur C. Clarke's first novel, **Childhood's End** is based. Published in 1953, it is still an impressive creation, undimmed by the passage of time. Clarke's skillful blending of cosmic speculation and solid entertainment make it one of his best stories. Like *2001: A Space Odyssey*, it is an intellectual repository and a hopeful prophecy combined into an imaginative tour de force of visual dynamism.

Now, in the age of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters*, the challenge of bringing **Childhood's End** to the screen is being accepted by TV producer-writer-director Philip DeGuere. As part of his pre-production plans, DeGuere has commissioned a series of full-color illustrations from comic and commercial artist, Neal Adams.

DeGuere's credentials for bringing **Childhood's End** to life reach back to 1966, when he entered the TV field as a staff writer for **Run For Your Life**, and went on to work for **Name of the Game, Alias Smith and Jones**, and others for Universal Studios. He also served as the main scriptwriter for the first twelve episodes of **Kung Fu**. "I was thrown into a cage with the bear", and survived to work in many different capacities on shows like the **Six Million Dollar Man**, **Wonder Woman**, **City of Angels**, **Gus Gus Black Sheep** and **Doctor Strange**. His first draft script for **Childhood's End** was completed in May 1979, and he has written the first half of the TV-film **The Last Convertible**, due for broadcast this fall. His reasons for choosing Clarke's novel are simple.

"I think that **Childhood's End** is absolutely the best science-fiction novel ever written and one of the most seminal novels I have ever read in any genre. The story is clean, and its scope is massive.

"The analyses that have been made on the novel are fascinating: examining the mythic structure of it, and continue to reinforce the fact that this is a tremendous piece of speculative fiction in the best sense. It's like a time bomb: the idea, once planted in the brain explodes. People who read the book 25 years ago can't forget it.

Actually, I missed **Childhood's End** in the 50s. I read *City in the Stars* and all the other stuff from that decade, but don't ask me why, didn't get to **Childhood's End** until the late 60s. Maybe it was 2001 that boosted my interest in Clarke.

"I finally ingested it during the crucial 60s consciousness expanding period, and it seemed like a perfect statement on the concept of the evolutionary process of the human race.

The fact that Clarke is a manipulator of ideas has always been particularly appealing to me, which is not to say I wouldn't love to do **The Demolished Man** or **The Stars My Destination**. It's just that Clarke's images are well drawn in the book, especially in the end sequences with the descriptions of the other planets. The sheer amount of ideas in the book is overwhelming as I discovered when I started to figure out what could use.

"The next step came in 1975, here at Universal. I'd left the studio for three years to make some independent movies and got tired of being broke, so came back. Suddenly discovered **Childhood's End** was optioned by Universal. Now I know I'm not Stanley Kubrick, who can go through a whole shelf of science fiction novels and say, "I'll make that one," but something really clicked in my mind when I found this book just waiting to be produced.

"It took three-and-a-half years to get **Childhood's End** assigned to me and another year to clear up the legal problems. I was getting very impatient after investing four years in pursuing the project and writing the treatment so I finally decided to call Clarke on the phone to see how he felt about the project and my work on it. I'd never had any direct contact with him, and had no idea what it was going to be like. He has his own Earth Station, and he picks up his telephone and television beams right from satellites over Sri Lanka—the BBC gave it to him. I dialed the number and the answered the phone! started out with something real sharp like 'Gee, you don't know me, but' It turned out to be an eleven-and-a-half hour conversation.

Clarke's immediate interest was with the attitude DeGuere had in handling **Childhood's End**. How faithful would he be to the novel? How much money did he have to spend to bring it to the screen? How would he handle the unusual special effects?

"I had heard from a few sources that Arthur might not be too happy with the film plans. I found out first from his agents and then from him that there was no animosity towards the idea—I would assume that equitable arrangements had been made. I simply wanted to talk to him myself because I couldn't imagine going into the project without consulting him first.

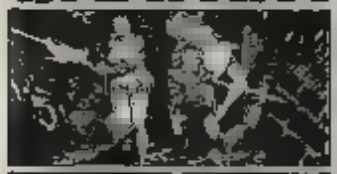
"I kept a pretty fair amount of Clarke's dialogue in the script, and spent a number of fruitless months exploring other avenues trying to get the writing done before I realized that the choices made in the book were in many instances by far the best, not only in terms of structure, scenes and characters but right down to the dialogue. I can't say that any of it will made it into the film for the simple reason that I have only written the first draft, which is usually changed when the director, cast and technicians are added to a project. Things are really refined then, and what works in a novel doesn't always play well with actors.

"A novel is the playing of ideas in a narrative structure. In a movie, most of these things must go because the only way to express them is through talk, and you can't have three hours of talking. What replaces much of this are significant visual details that might be awkward in a novel. For instance, *2001* was a fundamentally sterile picture, but there were details that held the viewer—the shape of chairs, how the food was handled in a tube, the PanAm rocket to the moon—familiar yet futuristic handling of basic elements.

This isn't a picture about guys with beards and funny suits, but a technologically accurate portrait of a *possible* future, right down to the smallest detail—like what are the pop-tops on a can of Coca-Cola going to look like in 50 years. Arthur's not only a storehouse of ideas on probable futures, but he's also known for the accuracy of his prophecies. I'd love to shut him in on those levels to replace a lot of the ideas from the book with updated references.

"He may also give me ideas on how to dramatize the fact that there's no more poverty, no more war. Drama evolves out of conflict, but there is no conflict in a Utopian society and I don't want to use the old cliches of people being bored. I don't think anyone will find that very compelling, it's been overdone."

CANNON



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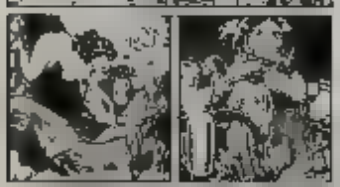

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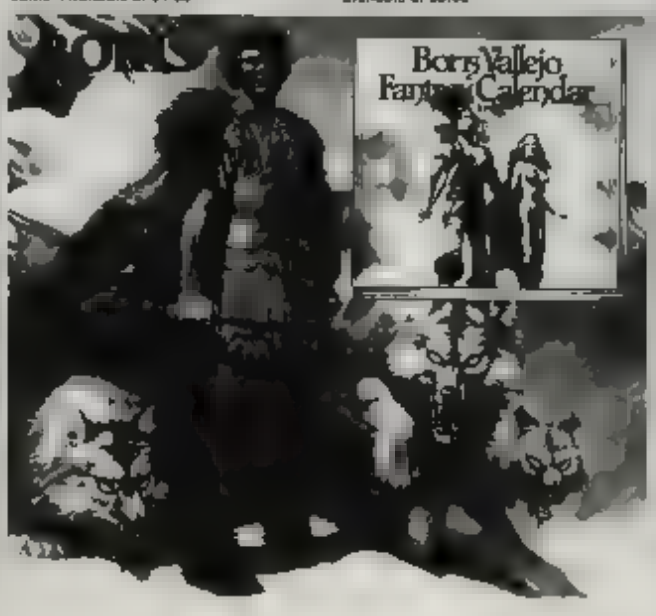

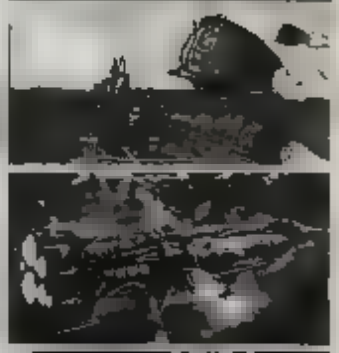

THE KIND OF ILLUSTRATED SCIENCE FICTION THE OTHERS TALK ABOUT

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And how does Clarke himself feel about Alterations being imposed on his first-born masterpiece? Excerpts from several letters to DeGuere, written after reading the screenplay seem to vindicate the shifting of characters and storyline:

"Your script arrived the same day as my first Hovercraft which had been smashed in transit.

The main thing is that I'm delighted you've preserved the spirit of the story so well. Where you have made changes they have been for the better- or at least have opened up interesting avenues.

In his script, DeGuere has elevated one of the novel's minor characters to a major role. Through and around Jan Rodericks, the entire action of the plot is built. He appears in the opening scene of the film, exploring near the rim of a crater on a remote island somewhere in the Pacific. Because of a massive, unknown presence in the stratosphere, all the world's nuclear powers have unleashed their atomic warheads believing they were under attack by foreign forces. The missiles sink out harmlessly as the alien ships appear and the story gets underway.

Five years pass and Rodericks is picked up in the plotline again, this time to interplay with a female member of the World Freedom League. The WFL is a revolutionary movement dedicated to discovering the reason the Overlords have come to Earth - nothing is for free - and why they have never revealed themselves. As mankind's prosperity has increased, his ambition and initiative have decreased proportionately. So has religion, art and science. They believe that civilization will become literate to the upcoming Golden Age of Overlord supervision.

Against this background parallax, a host of participating characters interact with all-too-human emotion setting into play an engrossing drama, rippling with fascinating details of the future. Two-thirds of the script is fully paced by their developments, always to the counterpoint of Karellen's appearances as he monitors life on Earth.

Rodericks is consumed with curiosity about the Overlords, and DeGuere has him stowaway inside a model of a dinosaur aboard one of their cargo ships. On their planet, he learns the secret of the Overlords and the reason for their forced evolution of mankind, while back on Earth, children begin to experience dreams that wake and project them deep into the universe. Then it is discovered that even the Overlords answer to a higher power.

"The only major change I've made is with Jan Rodericks, who appeared in the last half of the book. He's now one of the first characters we meet, and also the last kids on Earth. Rodericks is a sort of framing device—the narrative witness throughout the entire chain of events. His slowing away is the suspense element that replaces the book's Stormgren kidnapping. That was one of the first ideas I tried out on Arthur in our phone conversation, and he approved because the first part of the story was originally an entirely separate novella.

"You see, there are a couple of blind alleys in the book—the kidnapping serves only to give the idea that Stormgren might get a look at Karellen. The Ouija board sequence, which gives Jan a number from the National Geographic Survey has nothing to do with his slowing-away because he's just going to take the ride, wherever it goes—he doesn't need to know the co-ordinates. I didn't take the Ouija board sequence out, because it foreshadows a later action involving the children, but took him away the party and moved the slowing-away sequence towards the front, before the party.

"That's the basic change, and it sounds simple but let me tell you it took fifteen months to come up with it. It unifies the book and solves the problem of making big jumps in time with no continuity of characters.

"I've got Jan slowing away at the beginning of the story now in a dinosaur instead of a whale, and falling asleep before he or the audience knows what the Overlords look like. In the book he wakes in the ship, but it struck me that a humorous alteration would be to let him sleep until the dinosaur and everything else are unloaded, and have him wake up in the Overlords museum at whatever the equivalent of night is on their planet. Then he would go exploring and run into the next exhibit down, where the models are the denizens of whatever worlds they represent, and suddenly confront something like a lizard with a laser gun. He'd run off screaming, and then it would suddenly occur to him that, in this fantastically large museum, he could go up to every model alien creature and never know - it was an Overlord or not. Then the vision would hit him, of running up to everything in sight and saying 'Take me to your leader' and never getting a reply—maybe even dying of starvation just looking for the Overlords.

"Now Jan doesn't wake up until the story is well on its way into the New Athens sequence of the film, so that the audience will know what the Overlords look like before he does. I let him sleep that long just so could get him back for the end of the film - the time and space factor was flexible because nobody knows how long the journey takes near the speed of light."

Clarke responds accordingly to DeGuere's suggestions: "Why a brontosaurus (instead of whale? I've no objection (I love dinosaurs!) but with a whale he won't need a ladder.

"We've nothing to do with hyperspace or Warp Five—there's no fictitious super-science, and indeed we depend on travelling slower than light to get the time-dilation effect. This is almost certainly the way things will really be."

Energized by positive feedback from Clarke, DeGuere is relentlessly pursuing the project and receiving a great deal of support from fans both inside and outside the movie industry.

"The reason that the enthusiasm for **Childhood's End** is starting to build is because the script does translate from the novel, the active novel.

"What happens is that somebody like me writes a script with X number of scenes, characters, locations, and days of shooting. All this information is assembled like a data readout. The studio is the computer. They feed in this program, and the budget figure pops out the other end. This figure is the main factor the executives use to decide whether or not to go ahead and schedule a film for production."

Because **Childhood's End** is rich with ideas on a cerebral level, the question naturally rises as to whether the studio will step in with suggestions concerning ray guns and shiny costumes to give the younger viewer something to watch. Phil is quick to discount this possibility:

"I don't find, in movies or television, people coming in and suggesting 'add some sex, add some violence, or at least it hasn't happened to me yet. People talk about it, but so far I've had no interference. The attitude of most of studio has been, 'You're crazy. What do you think you're doing?' To which the answer has been, 'Well, as long as you're going to let me try, don't care what you think.'"

EXTERIOR. IN NEW YORK CITY. Hall a century has passed since the Overlords came to Earth. High overhead, the alien ship begins to move for the first time since the day it arrived. First Avenue is a solid wall of people as far as we can see. Television cameras are broadcasting this event around the world. A hush falls over the crowd as an opening appears in the underside of the great ship, now almost claustrophobically close overhead. A glowing ball of light appears and drops toward the place. A circle of darkness opens in it. A bright, silver disk appears within the darkness and floats out, dropping to the pavement. The crowd leans forward to see Karellen for the first time.

KARELLEN'S VOICE. There are just three points I have would

ed, and one of them points, delighted:

A CHILD: Look—he's got a tail!

ON KARELLEN—his body is primate and shiny black, not really human but of similar design. His feet are hooves, cloven. His tail is supple and flattened on its end. His wings are magnificent, flexing slightly as a gust of wind jostles over him. A pair of horns sweep back from his brow. His fingers are long, graceful, tapered. His face could be that of any demon ever seen by man in the most fearful of dreams.

AN OLDER MAN: He looks like the devil.

THE CHILD frowns, looks at Karellen, then at the man.

CHILD: What's the devil?

The revelation of the Overlords, in the personage of Karellen, takes place about halfway through DeGuere's script. The problems inherent in the realization of physically creating not only one character but an entire race of aliens which appear later in the story have become a primary concern in bringing the novel faithfully to the screen.

The use of a non-Hollywood artist like Neal Adams was one of DeGuere's most radical departures from the standard procedure of selling a TV property and one that helped in visualizing the unusual concepts involved. But the choice of Adams was not a casual one—it was a calculated maneuver that had and will continue to have an impact on the decision-makers at Universal.

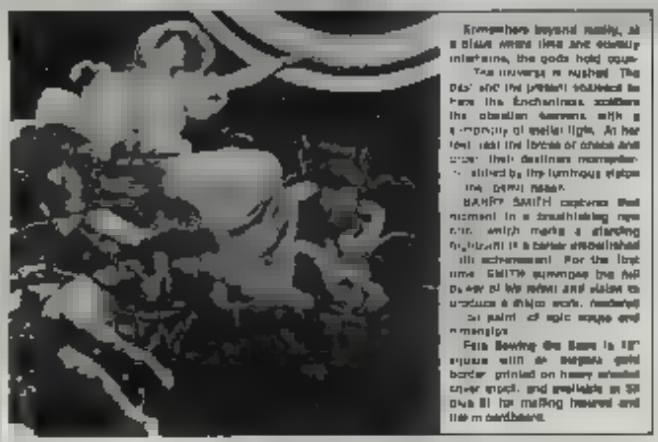
"Neal Adams is one my favorite artists," called and he answered the phone. asked him if he'd be interested in working on **Childhood's End**. The phone dropped on the other end of the line and it took him a minute to start talking again. There was a rather nice chemistry between us right from square one.

"Actually, Neal's contributions were tremendous, not only in the art but in consideration that he was working without any guarantee of payment for about three months. I had real difficulty convincing the powers-that-be to give me money for art. Basically, they were taking the attitude, 'Hey, just write the script.'

"The only problem with Neal's work is that without me being in any kind of direct daily contact to supervise the preliminary sketches, they cannot be considered true production drawings. They are basically illustrations from the novel and certain portions of my script. Their effect was exactly as I'd hoped. They knocked people out.

"I've done this sort of thing before hiring comic people for visual aids. A number of younger filmmakers are trying to get the best fantasy artists together for the purpose of film production. I got Frank Brunner to do some costume designs for **Doctor Strange** a few years back. I'm interested in getting Richard Corben to help on **Childhood's End**, and Neal suggested an artist named Scott Thom who works on record jackets, and has the ideal luminescent quality for the end of the picture when

Richard O'Brien reveals FIRST NEWS of the Rocky sequel! Sue Blane recreates the costuming of the Rocky Horror bodies! The infamous RHPS birthday party! A host of horrible exclusives are on hand in the new Rocky Horror Magazine, a 84-page monument to depravity designed to delight all those who've decided not to *dream it, but to be it!* Oceans of pictures in color and b&w flesh out the most bizarre fantasy this side of Transylvania. A steal at $7.95. The RHPS Poster Magazine gives the lowdown on Little Nell's portrayal of Columbia in a steamy *first person* interview replete with photos. In addition there's a putrid pair of posters that would make even Riff Raff blanch. $1.50

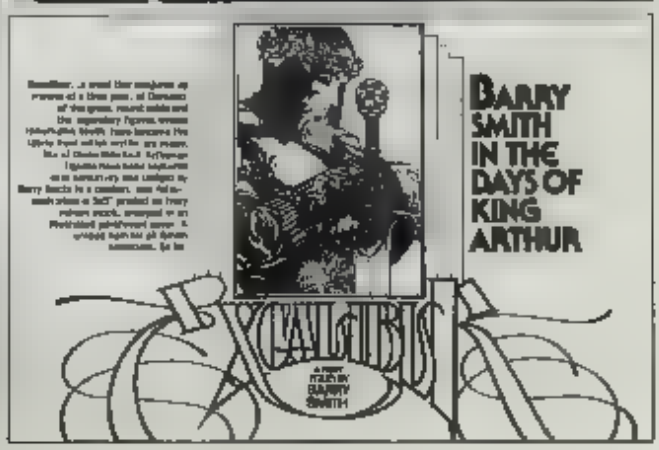


Somewhere beyond reality, at a place where time and eternity intertwine, the gods hold court.

The universe is ruptured. The Old and the present collided to form the Enchantress, soothing the obsidian heavens with a symphony of stellar light. At her feet roil the forces of chaos and order: their destinies manipulated by the luminous visions the Dawn Bearer.

BARRY SMITH captures that moment in a breathtaking new color watch marks a standing highpoint in a career established with achievement. For the first time Smith leverages the full power of his talent and vision to produce a philosophical work, rendered in paint of epic scope and mannique.

Fully boxing the Suite is 18" square with an elegant gold border printed on heavy mounted cover stock, and available at $20 each ($1 for mailing insured and first-class cardboard.



everything goes up in flames.

"Technically," Phil continues, "Neal's work is over until I get a go-ahead from the studio, and then I plan to have him back. I think there is a whole range of inspirations outside the movie business to be tapped and I want to pursue the team effort. For now we're switched to working with a group of artists, make-up people, effects specialists and art directors at the studio.

"Creatively we're still trying to catch up with some of the problems and situations Neal presented to us in his sketches. Take the ship for example. When his drawing came, suddenly I realized that the elements of the shape didn't work in this particular context, which was very instructive. So we're experimenting in some radical directions, maybe towards a flying wing—a smooth, simple, non-technologically-oriented concept.

Clarke had his own thoughts about the alien craft. "The painting of the ship's arrival over the city is stunning, but the design is too reminiscent of the *SS Enterprise*. And the tail looks too aerodynamic—though it might be a neat idea to model the Overlords tail."

In more detail, Clarke suggests:

Opening. Quite good, but too much like all the other space-invasion movies right back to **The Day the Earth Stood Still**. I'd like my totally different and even more dramatic visual shock of the US nuclear sub in Red Square, and the USSR cruiser in the Grand Canyon."

DeQuesa has even more serious problems to face. "The Overlord design," he says, "involves radical modification to get away from any basic recognizable human characteristics, yet still keep the Satanic premise Arthur hit on that rather hard, and Neal and I agree, so we've tried some modifications. For instance, the legs aren't going to be human, the knees will [redacted] backwards. Why should arms come out of the shoulders? Since these are winged creatures the arms would be in a different place and the wings would dominate the shoulder area.

"The facial structure is radically altered. You can say the Overlords have eyes because they see, but they didn't necessarily develope a bony facial-structure to protect them. When it comes to ears, mouths, noses—forget it. There's no hair. Musculature is different. But we're too early into production to look into the Overlords or ship designs yet. What I am doing is attempting to define the costs of the project by incorporating the full range of problems to be met.

"They're all solvable problems, and I'm just organizing them so that the various departments can make up their production estimates. We've got a creature here twelve feet tall involving so much make-up from head to toe, mechanical devices to handle legs and arms coming out of different places, and the wings.

"How do you make wings work? They've never been done satisfactorily on film. This isn't just a quick flash monster that jumps out of the shadows, but one of a group of characters walking around and speaking in the sunlight, creating a whole strata of technical problems. They have to be totally flexible, yet not too terrible. They have to move in a way we won't immediately recognize as a bird or a bat, and they can't just hang on the Overlords backs. We also have to have an actor inside the whole works who must be able to support and manipulate the wings. Or we have to build a separate wing structure that supports itself if it's too heavy. We may have to build sets of wings that can only be photographed from certain angles which will mean changing the whole set-up frequently. When we have that figured out, we are able to say it looks like it will take X number of months to figure out mechanically, then we'll have to do a screen test to see if it works. Once we've passed that we know it will take X number of hours every day to put the actor inside. The sheer technical problems will limit the kind of work we can shoot so all the Overlord sequences will have to be strategically planned.

Jim Danforth came over to assess the situation regarding stop-motion animation. Rick Baker's also interested in doing it, especially if it comes to the point where we're making a total mechanical suit.

"What we're talking about is the single most important aspect of the film. The Overlords will take time, money, research and development to create. Nobody's ever made an alien which is articulated and believable and which functions as a true character throughout the story. The creature in **Alien** was only on the screen for several minutes, usually in sectional closeups, and stayed in the shadows or strobe light displays. The creatures in **Childhood's End** are around for half the picture. By the end of the movie you are identifying with the Overlords—they're the only characters left, and you're feeling sympathy for them, with irony, compassion, and emotion."

Clarke agreed and made the following observations about Adams' contribution. "The pictures (with one exception) gave me the authentic illusion of skin-crawling excitement. The exception, as you've doubtless guessed, is the Overlord visualization, which is just a man with horns, etc. They must obviously be totally non-human—yet with enough resemblance to make the Devil likeness plausible. It's a problem and I suggest two approaches—the insect and the saurian.

"You might also get some input looking at photographs of bat faces—some of these are incredibly diabolical and yet all the structures serve some useful purpose e.g. sonar. The same might be true of Karellan. The Overlords might use sonar in their thick atmosphere.

During DeQuesa's initial phone conversation with Neal Adams their enthusiasm for *Childhood's End* was mutually contagious. Neal was familiar with the novel, and readily accepted the assignment which eventually yielded a dozen full-color highly-detailed drawings and a handful of short storyboard roughs. DeQuesa is using this material in the form of color photoprints inserted into copies of his script, to show Universal executives precisely what kind of film he is after.

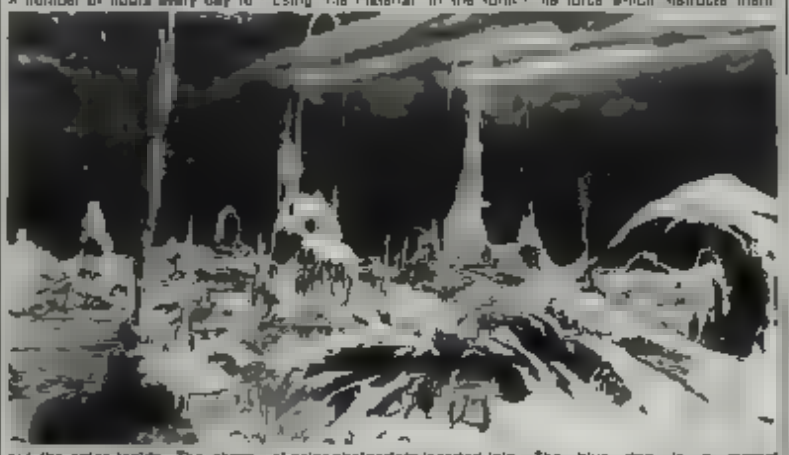
"I think we have the potential to make one of the best science-fiction movies ever," Neal declares. "Phil can do it, and I want to help. I like to feel that we're taking advantage of all the possibilities by using my drawings to promote the sale of the project. The pictures are like baubles to dangle before the executives—they're like comics, the pictures make you want to read the words.

Of the twelve illustrations prepared by Adams, the five on these pages are the only ones being released for publication, and are seen here for the first time. Neal comments on their creation:

"The painting with the dinosaur was designed to be somewhat of a shocker. The odd juxtaposition of the old ox the brontosaurus, crystal structures and other floating elements are supposed to be intriguing and arousing. I was trying to capture the sense of the moment when Jan Rodericks got his first view of the Overlords rushing by on a moving sidewalk. He's half-raised out of his chair and probably saying, 'What the hell?'

"The color (pink) of the spaceship over Manhattan is not quite right, now that I look at it in retrospect, but at the time, all I was trying to convey was the imagery of a five-mile wide spacecraft over New York City. The design was entirely mine, and will probably change. I thought out the mechanics of this craft rather extensively and came up with a means of motor drive that functions on the revolution of matter. The whole ship is a continuous matter transmitter so that when it is moving, only the front is readily seen—the back becomes transparent in a vapor trail. The disc section is a self-contained unit and the three pronged radiating out the back rotate around it to change direction.

"The mountain of fire with the ring around it is on the planet of the Overlords, and is shown to Jan Rodericks from the top of the highest pinnacle on their world. The mountain is the Overlord's intellectual and communal link with the Overmind, the force which instructs them.



The blue ring is a surreal representation of the Earthman's view and signifies his link to the potential of his growth. The Overlord cannot see the ring at all, which sums up the inability to achieve the latent Godhood of humanity, and ties into the climax at the end of the film.

"The bizarre planet of geysers and bubbling rock formations is one of the first visited by the children's minds in the dream sequence. It is a sulphur planet, without life, which overlooks with molten rock that hardens immediately creating the alien surreal, yet realistic landscape you see. The planets designed tended to become stranger and more incredible the further away the children's minds journeyed. There are no planets of giant jellyfish, however—I just don't believe in that sort of thing.

"The last illustration is of one of the outer planets in the solar system. It shocks the Overlords because they have never seen that far into space. It is a planet of crystals, used by the Overmind as a sort of mental design overdrive. The geometric patterns are controlled, like the cells of a giant body, and put in various places and shapes by an artist who can control the universe—at least that's what I was thinking when I drew it up.

"Each piece took about a half-hour to sketch out the idea, and a good three or four days to enlarge, pencil, ink and color here at the studio. I had quite a few showing the Overlords in greater detail but Phil is changing their design and keeping the drawings out of circulation so everyone won't say 'it's some kind of Devil movie and rip it off on TV.' I also did an Overlords space control room that will probably be used by the set designers. It's a nifty piece—so good that the finished job will probably be a let-down.

"I'm ready right now to do a new concept drawing of Karellan. I take about four or five days and paint it up real right with features and details. I've accepted Phil's attitude about *Childhood's End* for now. It's out of our hands, so we'll just wait and see if it sells. Then we'll sit down to refine both our ideas—it's the refining that really makes the difference you know. But it's simply not the time to take that step yet."

KARELLAN: You must understand. In the last thirty years events have proceeded rapidly. Civilization has ceased to exist on Earth. The last of your race died out, leaving only this, the children. There are three hundred million of them.

JAN: What are they doing?

KARELLAN: We called this the Long Dance. What it meant, we have no idea. Perhaps the Overmind was training them, molding them gradually into a single unit. For ten years, none of them has moved. We have no idea when they will begin their journey.

JAN: Journey?

KARELLAN: To the Overmind.

EXTERIOR. THE TERRACE, NIGHT

JAN: It's beginning. They're starting to come out of their trance. They're turning the moon on its axis. And now a wind's coming up. The stars are starting to go out. The children—they're going. They're on their way at last. Oh, my God. It's incredibly beautiful! Like a fountain flowing outwards to the stars. I'm beginning to understand everything now. Our path is to become one with the universe, to be the universe.

HIS POINT OF VIEW—THE SKY: The stars are dimming. Something is beginning to appear in the night sky—a filmy network of lines, stretching from horizon to horizon and beyond. Rising up from the far side of the Earth, reaching out into space itself, is a burning column of living light. The column of fire, like a finger pointing to the heavens, continues to grow and expand around its base, a ring is forming, golden in color, like the sun it sweeps into the heavens. The light consumes him as the mountain behind him

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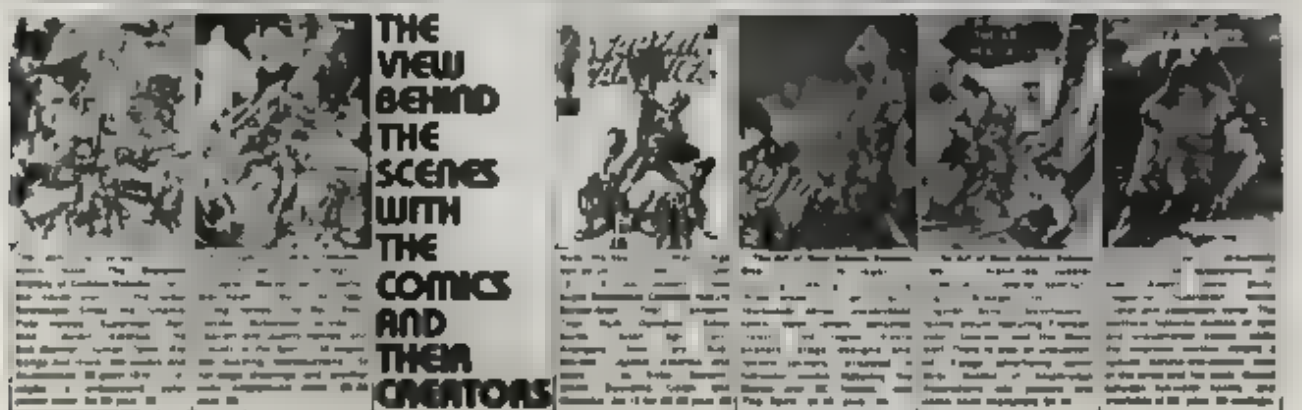
THE VIEW BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE COMICS AND THEIR CREATORS



angels in a tower of flame that rises and does not fall. The world itself becomes part of the pattern of life, which now reaches out past the moon, tugging it from its orbit to join the communion.

Marking Jesus the next step in cosmic evolution as **Childhood's End** closes. The ultimate finality of it is both shocking and exhilarating, and one of the primary concerns that Clarke asked DeGuere about during their initial phone conversation. In fact, his first question was, "How are you going to deal with the downbeat ending?"

That shocked me, DeGuere admits "because I had never thought of it as downbeat. I have since discovered that there are people who interpret **Childhood's End** as a cautionary tale that says, you're so screwed up human race, that you're going to lose everything. And when the children go off at the end of the story they see it as a failure of humanity.

"Obviously people can project various meanings into the ending. But analyzed in terms of basic mythical patterns throughout the centuries, it pretty clearly indicates that we're dealing with a rebirth cycle. And the overall message of the book is that as long as human beings are prepared to accept the limits of their own logic and knowledge and accept that there's something more in the universe than we can define by our own philosophy, then there is hope that we can transcend our current state of affairs. There's nothing depressing about that at all. It's a kind of basic mystical transcendental fundamentally religious hope for the future somewhat analogous to 2001.

"I still consider it important to sit down with Arthur and hammer out the script simply to get his current thoughts on many different aspects of the project. I want to be absolutely faithful to the book. What the audience will see on the screen is **Childhood's End**. There are going to be surprises, some of which are very intentional that I've added because I think they're really more fun. And some may be necessitated by forces beyond our control like money. But there's no point in deviating from the novel; it's too well known.

Clarke had other ideas about the film's ending. "Finale. Obviously this is the key to the whole movie and needs the most thought. You've got the spirit fine, but as a quick first reading I think it may be too verbose and not poetical enough.

"Perhaps we should use a narrator (very sparingly). I'd like to end with the final paragraphs of the book, as a direct quote. We'd planned this in 2001, and though Stanley Kubrick changed his mind he used narration effectively in *Strangelove* and Barry Lyndon. And here we have to feel it's the transcendental (Godlike) viewpoint which the characters themselves may not be able to express.

The proliferation of science-fiction films has both helped and hurt **Childhood's End**'s prospects for going into production, and DeGuere is reluctant to categorize his film in the same league as **Star Wars** and **Star Trek**.

"One thing I'm counting on is that the material itself is well enough known to generate enthusiasm. Another is that the executives may decide that this is the kind of picture they'd like to do, so that it isn't a dollars and cents decision, it happens. I think that if you look at a picture like **The Concorde** you see dollar signs but no passionate commitment. On the other hand, The Wiz had its financial appeal but I think somebody upstairs pushed it through by saying, "I'd personally like to make a picture like **The Wiz**.

"If you look back upon the fact that he pops has never been out of print since the early 50s, the number of people who have had it around the world is staggering. Plus Clarke's name is well known in science-fiction and film circles. So the executives all have a certain confidence that they are not just walking into an irresponsible picture—they're getting a movie as closely and lovingly controlled as possible.

"Right now I'm just waiting for the decision from Universal hope to have about six months to really work out the details of the Overlords construction, then we've got to build the suit. There will be problems there too. Rick Baker was here the other day with his monkey suit for **Tarzan**, which is the most incredible thing I've ever seen but the material is falling apart on him. So we may have a problem just getting the rubber make-up man use—you can't find it anymore. We won't be ready to shoot a roll of film until all the mechanical tricks and special effects difficulties have been worked out.

When questioned as to whether a cast and production crew have been assembled yet or are even under consideration, DeGuere is at once cautious and optimistic in his expectations.

"**Childhood's End** has been continually attracting the attention of some of the top talents in the film business. I can't talk about most of the names, but I'm sure we could put together a stellar group of talent.

Clarke had his own thoughts about who might make the film. "Whom do you propose as director? The man who said Stanley thinks is the best director in the world (well, the best but one...) has been dying to do a major s.f. movie for years and we once spent a lot of time working on a project which never came off. What do you think of Satyajit Ray?"

"I will be the film's producer," DeGuere reveals, and I do have a director in mind. The elements of the package make it attractive, and I think there's no limit to the people it would draw. I can't say that Marlon Brando would be attracted to playing Karellan, as opposed to Laurence Olivier playing Stormgren—it all depends on who likes what material.

As a matter of fact, would really like to work with Olivier and at one time I thought he would make a great Karellan. But how we would get a somewhat diminutive and elderly man to play a 12-foot demon who may have to carry 40 pounds of wing structure on his back is beyond me.

"It's funny, but there aren't that many starring roles in **Childhood's End**, book or film. That can work either way in the casting department. Somebody might say to me, 'If you want to get an actor of Olivier's caliber you'll have to beef up his role and make it more important.' And that's a strong valid argument. But on the other hand, a lot of actors like to do smaller parts with high exposure, like Brando in **Apocalypse Now**, so it could be a drawing point. Max Von Sydow would be good as Stormgren and perhaps Christopher Lee would find Karellan right down his line. Neil Sheaya saw Chuck Connors as embodying the evil image needed for maybe Jack Palance.

"Right now, I'm just waiting. We should get a budgeting figure soon and that will tell the tale. My gut feeling is that if the figure is $25 million there's not going to be much conversation. $10 million will get a lot more conversation. Somewhere within the broad range of $5 to $30 million is what **Childhood's End** will cost.

Armed with that number, I'm going to have to represent myself to the studio, then wait for an answer. When they'll get back to me, I don't know. Things don't work on my timetables.

"If I get the go-ahead tomorrow, and the package were for a three-hour special on ABC, my guess is that they'd want to put it on the air in September 1980, and they'd probably get it in November. Now that's a very unrealistic schedule, and it would require a great deal of extra expense to get it done that fast.

"I would prefer ideally 90 years but that's a little too long, again for money reasons. Somewhere between fifteen months and two years it could be done.

"You know, we just might break the hold of the effects people with this project. We could spend enough pre-production time to get most of the special effects footage in the can before the principal photography begins, so that we're not faced with the **Star Trek** situation of spending another fortune trying to wrap-up a picture twice—once before and once after the effects team gets ahold of it.

"There's always the distinct possibility that Universal may just look at the script and the proposal, and simply decide not to bother taking the chance. If that episode [illegible] don't know. I'd

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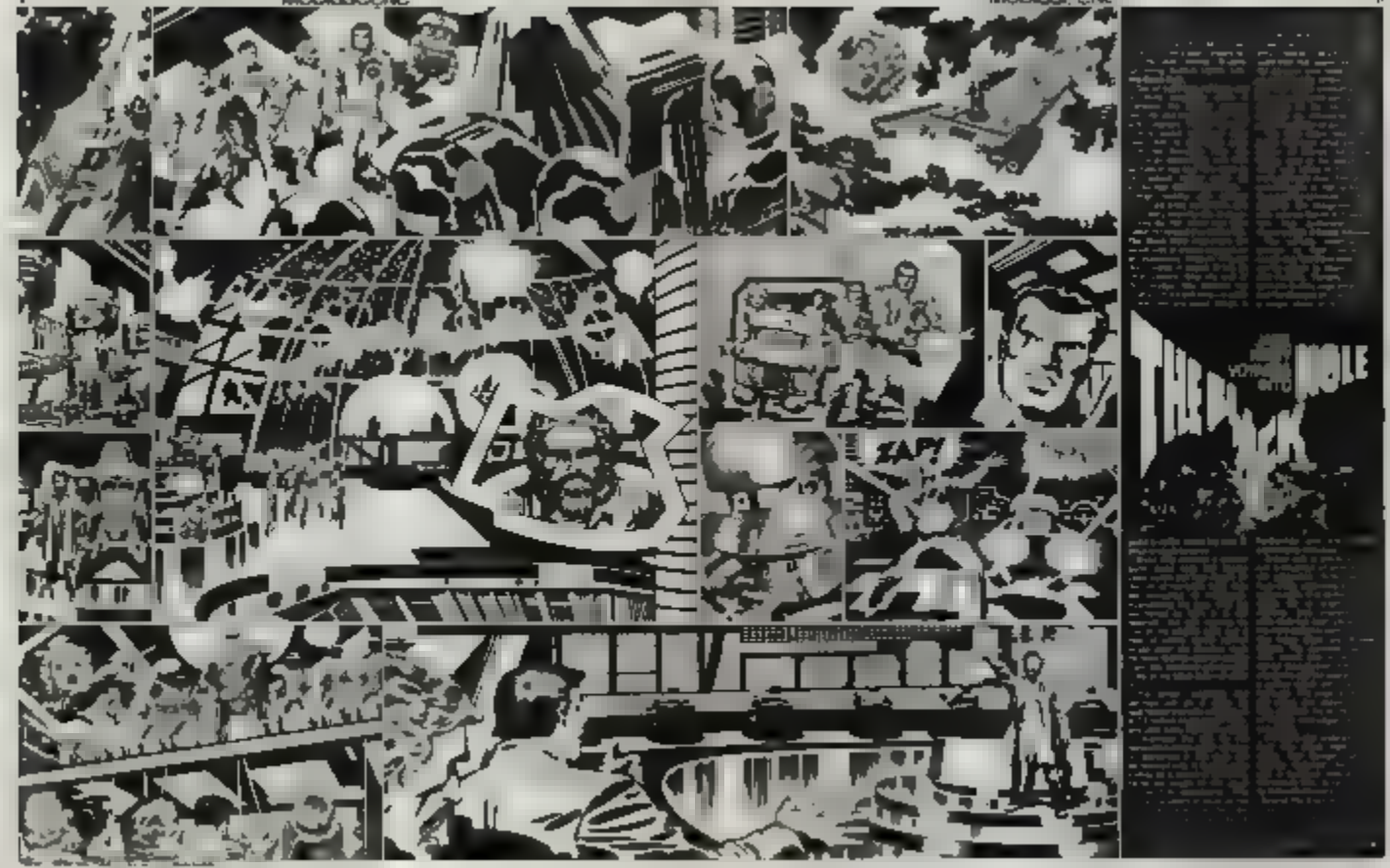
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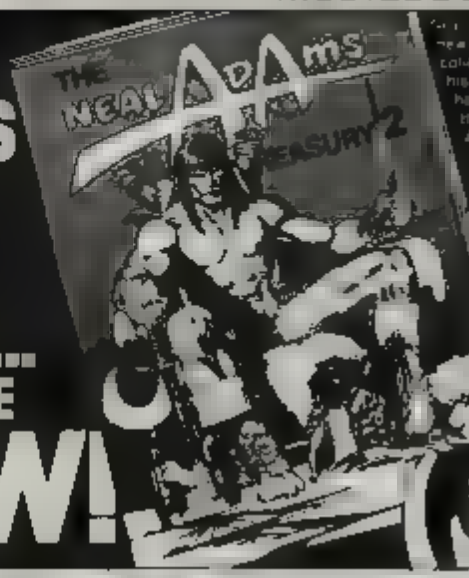

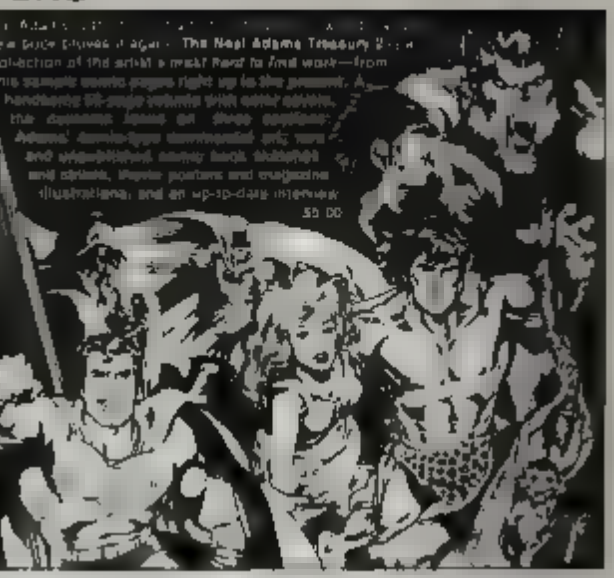

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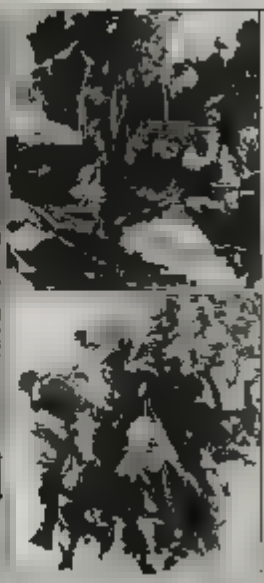

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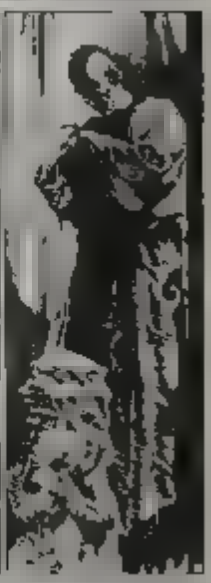

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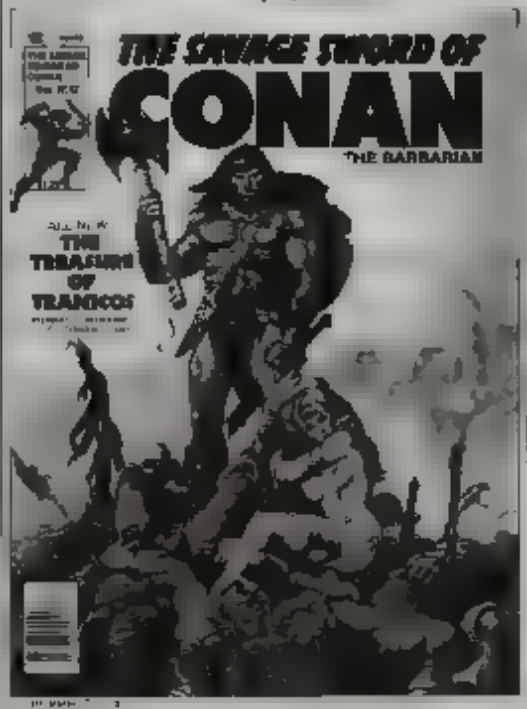
When **The Empire Strikes Back** on May 7 980 the reverberations of its impact will be felt throughout the world, particularly in the Marvel Comics lineup. Plans are being formulated now as to how to present their adaptation of **Empire** most effectively probably taking advantage of the full-color magazine format potential of **Marvel Super Special**.

Deluxe treatment is being afforded the **Star Wars** sequel, primarily because of the exceptional success that accompanied the initial film—second printings of each of the first six issues and six separate printings of the premiere issue, totaling some four to five million copies, according to Jim Shooter's estimates. Archie Goodwin is blocking-out the comic version but there is still no definite assignment of artist. The Star Wark Corporation has expressed a preference for Al Williamson but his current commitment to the daily **Secret Agent Corrigan** newspaper strip has restricted his available time. The comic has been drawn by Carmine Infantino for nearly two years, he may also wind up with this choice assignment but the **Empire** package is being given special handling, so a last minute change is still possible.

In a parallel development **MEDIASCENE**'s west coast editor Don Glut has been chosen to write the official novelization of **The Empire Strikes Back**. The deal was made in deep secrecy in mid-May and most of the details are still not for general release but Don promises that he has followed the original script as closely as possible, utilizing most of the movie's dialogue, and capturing the atmospheric texture thanks to a thorough examination of the production paintings, storyboards stills and available footage.

The film itself begins on the ice world of Hoth, where the Rebel Alliance has carved a new base of operations out of the frozen wastes with their lasers. The Princess, Han Solo, Chewbacca and the two droids are all on hand for instant viewer identification and the time is several months after the destruction of the Death Star. Approximately the first half-hour of the film takes place on Hoth, before proceeding to a jungle planet and a gaseous world with plenty of pit stops for chases all battles, laser barrages monsters, and sights never before seen.

While the keynote is more of the old Star Wars action, there is a strong undercurrent of emotion and character delineation. The story sheds new light on all the established personalities and even retracts upon some of their actions in the first film. The script is charged with emotional scenes, and it becomes evident that Lucas is only beginning to reveal the entire Star Wars story.



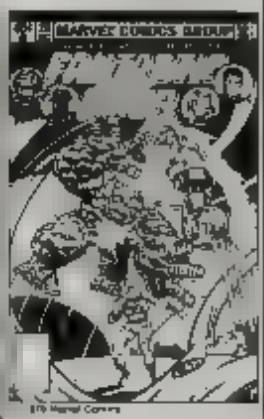
New characters have been added to the Empire cast, the most flamboyant being Baron Lando Calrissian, the Administrator of the Cloud City of Bespin, a remote mining planet. Calrissian is portrayed in bravura style by Billy Dee Williams, and is introduced as an old friend of Han Solo and the original owner of the Millennium Falcon (a full-scale model of which was built measuring 80 feet in length and weighing 40 tons—and it actually lifts off the ground by itself!)

The other new mask in the movie is Boba Fett introduced on the 1978 **Star Wars Christmas Special**. Fett is a bounty hunter in the employ of Darth Vader and like his master wears a formal concealing helmet at all times. He was once a mercenary Imperial Shocktrooper from the far side of the galaxy most of which were wiped out by the Jedi Knights in the Clone Wars, and still wears their outmoded armor complete with a jetpack, an arsenal of weapons and an assortment of Wookie scalps for ornamentation.

A lightsaber duel between Luke and Vader caps off the action, but the outcome will be surprising to everyone. The novel will be published in mid-April by Ballantine Books.

If the original **Star Wars** seemed to some critics to be simple space opera an action film with dazzling special effects but a modicum of plot and character Glut reveals, "**The Empire Strikes Back** shows George did his homework in plotting out the events of all twelve of his proposed **Star Wars** epics. He researched heroic storytelling and classic mythology. He was consciously aware of archetypes from legend and literature. And he applied what he learned to the characters and events depicted in his second galactic saga."

Glut is also involved in the



Star Wars newspaper strip along with several other comic book writers. The series regular artist and writer Russ Manning, has found that the task of producing a high-quality science fiction strip is very time consuming, so he has called upon Don Glut Gerber and Roy Thomas to help plot and script tales in the future.

There are three new editors at Marvel two in very high positions of authority with unified leashes among the staff. As a result Denny O'Neil has been put on staff to edit **Man-Thing**, **Spider-Woman** and **What-If** books that have been given a strong sense of direction. There is also a possibility that he will take over all the Spider-Man titles sometime next year, depending upon other negotiations still in progress. Several writers have questioned this amalgamation citing Denny's track record on **Beowulf**, **Justice Inc.**, **Kung Fu Fighter** and **The Shadow** at DC.

The second editorial hiring was even more unorthodox and even tougher for some to swallow. There are at least three different interpretations of how it happened but the final result is that Lynn Graeme has been added to the staff as the editor of the black & white magazines **Dracula**, **Marvel Preview** and **Howard the Duck**, along with **The Rampaging Hulk** color magazine. Jim Shooter lists her credentials as being a professional writer and editor, primarily for newspapers and magazines, but four other sources question the veracity of that resume.

Shooter does admit that she is totally without experience in editing fiction but defends his choice by saying: "I asked her a number of questions and was immediately impressed by her ideas. She responded with some good suggestions, and pinpointed several editorial problems in the black & whites that had been observing for some time.

"When you get right down to it there are very few real editors available within the comic field so I thought that my best shot would be in hiring a person who was intelligent, showed common sense and logical thinking, and

simply train them on the job. I also felt that the black & white magazines were a full time job, and wanted Rick Marschall to concentrate on the full color showcase magazines, **Epic** and **Marvel Super Special**."

Ms Graeme's ability to deliver as an editor will be put to the test in the coming months, but several writers and artists have already complained about her unfamiliarity with the comics medium. What is strange, however, is Shooter's reference to allowing Marschall to concentrate on Epic and Super Special, without once mentioning that he had fired Rick just three days earlier.

The purported reason for Marschall's firing questioned his competence, with two specific examples cited.

The Japanese Spider-Man TV-comic magazine ran into high production costs and that resulted in poor film frame enlargements. The book was completed with no apparent improvement and eventually shown to Stan and Jim Galton by Shooter as an inferior product produced under Marschall. In addition, there had been disagreements over the use of a Frank Frazetta cover for Epic. Reportedly the painting is an old one, featuring a large profile of a Roman Legionnaire, which was in Frazetta's unsold inventory and really did not suit the Epic format.

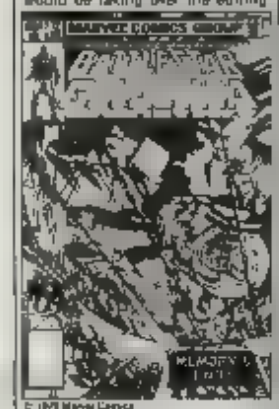
The consensus among most of the personnel directly in contact

COMIXSCENE

with the Marvel offices ... that "there are a lot of power games going on, but it's too soon to tell whether they will help or hurt the company. When asked to comment about his dismissal Marschall would only say "I guess I rubbed some people the wrong way."

Both Epic and Super Special were offered to several people before Marschall's firing, but no reassignment has been decided upon yet in the meantime. Larry Hama was hired as the staff editor of Crazy magazine, and freelance editor Paul Levitz "let go."

The most immediate result of this new structuring of power at Marvel came when Marv Wolfman discovered that Mr. Greene would be taking over the editing



of Dracula. "I have it in my contract that automatically edit whatever I write, but when we made Dracula a magazine I conceded to work only on the main feature and tell Rick Marschall and I could make the rest of the book work. I had great misgivings about this two-editor system and wanted to package the entire book the way Roy does Savage Sword of Conan.

"I felt justified in my position because I had maintained a high level of quality in the color comic for eight solid years and was usually a month early when everyone else was behind schedule. Things started to go bad right from the start when, in the very first issue, we lost Tom Palmer as the inker on Dracula, and the book went into decline of the back-up features. My main consideration was always the quality of the total package. I did not feel that Lynn's inexperience as a fiction writer or editor could improve this deteriorating situation, so I decided to quit writing Dracula altogether which was a heartbreaking thing to have to do. At about the same time, Shooter and I started seriously discussing the renewal of my contract which was running out at the end of this year and a new glimpse was that I could no longer edit what I write."

The outcome of Marv's negotiations eventually led to his signing a new contract with DC. "My reasons for leaving are personal," he explains. "The eight years I spent at Marvel were good, and I'm sorry to leave under these conditions. As of January 1, 1980, I'll be with DC writing 65 pages per month on five books.

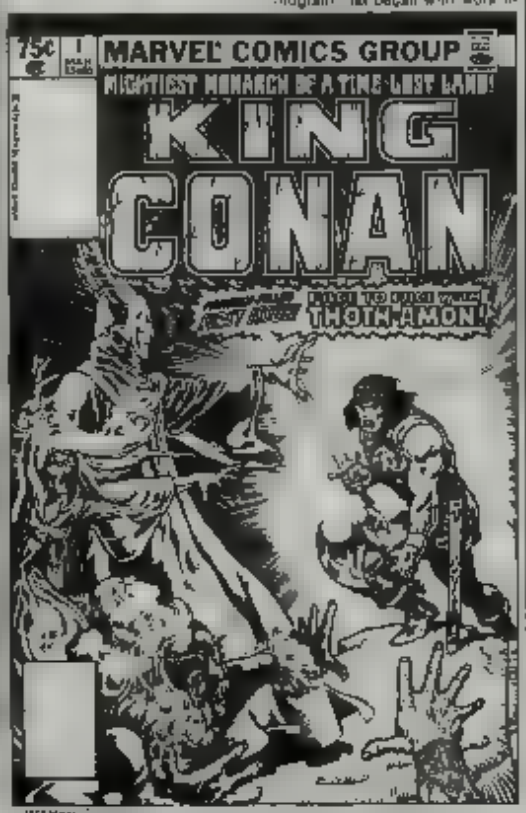
"Shooter appears to be trying to create a centralized power base. But Marvel is a very big outfit. Stan always told me to hire the best people, because they will make you look good and Jim does need the help of all the good people he can get to hold over fifty books in line.

"At DC, Marv will take over the writing of Superman, Green Lantern, World's Finest, Lois and Jimmy one-half of Brave and the Bold and one-half of DC Presents. "I've always wanted to do Superman particularly the Daily Planet oriented material and this will be the fulfillment p

control.

"I simply don't see the necessity of putting the editor/writer clause into contract form and it's only a problem once or twice a year. For example, Archie Goodwin is a freelance editor/writer who generally gets exactly what he wants and we go out of our way to accomodate his requests. We may eventually arrive at another working situation in the future and while I do not want anyone to leave Marvel I cannot speculate on what may happen.

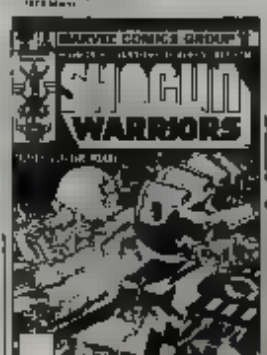
While all this intrigue unfolds within the upper levels of Marvel Shooter has accomplished a feat unique in the annals of comics: sharing the wealth with his workers by way of a new program that began with work in



progress during September.

"Marvel will pay a fee, in addition to the regular page rates, to creative personnel who work continuously on a feature. a Cadence letter announced. It then articulated the terms of the new system in relation to writers, pencilers and inkers. After six consecutive issues of a monthly comic book or magazine each contributor will receive a $250. After each additional six consecutive issues, they will receive an additional $500. After each six consecutive issues of a bi-monthly book $500 will be paid. After each four consecutive issues of a quarterly book $500 will be paid.

In effect this can amount to a $1000 bonus per year just for working on one title.



"The purpose of this program was to do something for the troops who put out the books," Shooter explains. "Last year was a bad one, but this year has turned out quite well, sales-wise, and this program reflects Marvel's financial stability.

"There are several additional reasons and byproducts of this system but the primary one is that it gives additional compensation to Marvel regulars and discourages the practice by which a few big-name freelance superstars can just walk in and pick top assignments, getting paid the same or better than a guy who has held down a title for three or four years. This will give the Marvel regulars a bit of an edge, make them feel more like Marvel people.

"It will also promote creative consistency, a factor which I think helps sales. It's very hard to keep readers interested in comics these days, and even tougher when the kid is hit with a different artist or storytelling style every two months; some characters literally turn over in their grands four times a year and kids really do want to know what they're getting most of the time.

"This will also encourage everybody to meet deadlines, make them more conscientious about the company's welfare. If somebody misses a deadline, they'll be concerned about losing their bonus—if we have to drop a fill-in replacement in the schedule, the bonus is gone for another six issues. On the other hand, if this program works and simply saves us some of the staggering time changes we often get from printers, there is a distinct possibility that many try to boost the rate to $2000 a year.

"Of course, we will go out of our way to accomodate special cases that may crop up that are completely the company's fault and not the artist's or writer's, such as a cancellation of a series with the fifth issue. Inventory jobs dropped into their run of stories, any decision to switch a creative team against his or her will, etc. I'd look at each case individually and make sure that the six issue policy was in effect wherever possible.

"Hopefully this could be the beginning of a cycle in comics

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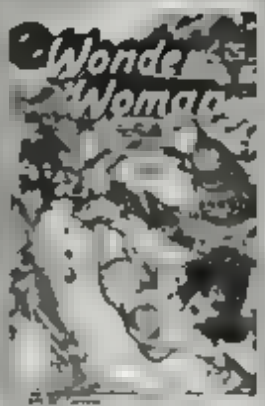


COMIXSCENE

From [illegible] the Shows manager passed along the word that Thick Green [illegible] used song lyrics for captions and crossed speak balloons to tell the story in a manner loosely defined from the KISS or Beatles projects. Then Bill Sienkiewicz sat down and produced 20 pages of art about a third of the book and now everyone is waiting for them to track down Jagger in France, which is wreaking havoc with our deadlines.

Meanwhile, had the occasion to hide under a pseudonym for the first time in my career as a comics writer a few weeks ago. I gave a simple 16-page mute plot to an artist and it simply came back totally mangled beyond recognition. I can't say it was a bad job by the artist and I thoroughly enjoy the guy's work most of the time but he really turned this multi panel mute out and what could to repair the situation, but when it was done we didn't feel too happy with it so decided to become an Arab for one issue. Kiss Me Rapid.

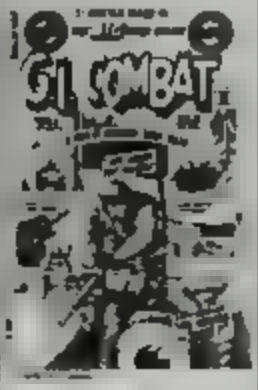
Doug has also been called upon to help John Buscema finish penning his stories early for the year. I, while Marvel Publishers it seems that John had taken the story right up to a pivoting sequence after some 20 pages but wasn't too sure as to how to bring about a climax with King Arthur, Merlin and Sabot in Hell. The tale does not [illegible] anything in Arthurian legends but the art is very much in the old Prince Valiant tradition and Tom Palmer is scheduled to be the inker.

In Marvel's other series the Shogun Warriors will undergo some radical changes in coming months as the Sanctuary is destroyed and The Followers of Light killed off. Now each Shogun robot operator will have to hide his own giant Underboy as well as carry out all repairs. This is in response to a decision by Jim Shooter to make the series more flavoured with a smidgen instead of realism in the character developments. When the series was created it was a conscious decision to keep the plots simple and the robots gimmicky, just like the cartoons were. Now things will proceed more [illegible] Marvel formula problems and plug holes even though Herb Trimpe's "big man" style may have to be substituted with that of a more realistically oriented artist.

In The Deadly Hands of Kung Fu, Doug is going to bring all his characters back to New York as soon as the latest part Fu Manchu sequence is wrapped up and simply try to live down and dominate the line up. There will be more emphasis on martial arts choreography and sequential right brained in an effort to recreate some of the book's lost energy. "Quincy and had the best rapport on that series," Doug explains, and it's never recovered completely from Paul's leaving. Either. Have not been given writers of sufficient ability since then, or they have simply not been cinematic storytellers. In either case, I have been on the look for years now, and it has been a long time since there was anything to get really excited about, so I plan to work more closely with Mike Zeck to pep things up. Sharp. As has always been the one character I've been identified with most and don't know yet how the Rick Marschall and Jim Griggs situations will affect my assignments as will continue to concentrate most heavily on Kung Fu.

At DC there has been no response yet to Marvel's two-issue bonus program but most likely already after a ten percent merchandising share system on non-comic utilization of characters and by stories which Marvel does not under the DC plan the utilization of the Huntress in the TV show Challenge of the Superheroes has already netted Paul Levitz, Joe Staton and Bob Layton a lethal of dollars, and Tony Isabella even got a few bucks for the use of Black Lightning in a page of the DC Calendar was year. A tournament was also made recently with John Aragon for a piece of the action in the upcoming Jonah Hex movie project.

In addition publisher Jenette Kahn has recently signed 35 contracts for the use of new superhero material in formats as diverse as a revival of the Big Little Book format for Superman and a Wonder Woman Pop-up Book. In addition there are plans for the reprint of a bookstore Superman Book of Super-Submissions in which



MARVEL ANNOUNCES
REVISED DIRECT SELLING TRADE TERMS

MARVEL COMICS REVISED TRADE TERMS

We are announcing today the following uniform trade terms for the sale of Marvel Comics on a non-returnable basis to "wholesale distributors" who service the comic collector store market. These terms will become effective with orders submitted for Marvel Comics scheduled for on sale in October 1978. For present accounts, the $600 minimum order requirement contained in Purchase Term No. 1 will be deferred until January 1, 1980, and the Drop Ship Provision charges contained in Purchase Term No. 7 (Note A) will be deferred until March 1, 1980.

Marvel Comics are available directly from the publisher on a non-returnable basis upon the trade terms developed in this letter. In addition, as you probably know, Marvel Comics are available on a returnable basis through more than 900 independent regional wholesalers who are serviced by the Curtis Circulation Company, Marvel's national distributor. Comics distributed through the Curtis/wholesaler network are available on a returnable basis at a price structure differing substantially from those stated in this letter.

The trade terms stated herein are available only to wholesaler distributors who resell the comics to other distributors or independently owned retail outlets. The price structure does not apply to affiliated retail outlets which may be owned either by the distributor personally or through a corporation. Wholesale distributors who sell a portion of their comics on a retail basis either directly or through affiliated retail outlets owned by the distributor personally or through a corporation must specify on their order form the number of copies to be sold on such retail basis. Marvel will give a discount of 60% on this retail portion of such order.

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6. **Credit Terms: Net 30 days (See note B below).**
7. **Drop Ship Provision: See Note A below.**

8. **Packaging: Order will be shipped in packaging of Marvel's choice. Those distributors requesting packaging in corrugated cartons will be charged $.40 per carton required.**

Notes:

(A) Drop Ship—The above terms apply to a shipment to a single designated point (i.e. the distributor's warehouse). Marvel will drop ship to the distributor's customer upon the following conditions:

1. **Each shipping point must have a minimum order of $100 per month.**
2. **On shipping points having a monthly order of less than $5,000 an additional charge payable to Marvel Comics to cover shipping and handling of $.017 per copy and $2.20 per title for each drop ship point. There shall be no charge for shipping points having a monthly order of $5,000 or more.**

(B) Credit Terms—Credit terms stated apply to distributors who have done business with Marvel for at least (3) months. New accounts will be required to submit payment with order for the first three months. After the establishment of such credit, the standard credit terms will apply net 30 days above.

Marvel reserves the right to change these purchase terms upon 30 days notice to the distributor. Such notice will appear on the monthly solicitation forms sent out by Marvel and by separate letters sent to all accounts. To assure the integrity of the distribution system, copies distributed on a non-returnable basis pursuant to these terms may carry on their cover different indicia than those copies distributed through the Curtis/wholesaler method which are returnable. At the present time, copies distributed on a non-returnable basis carry a diamond-shaped indicia rather than the 35 Pest number and Curtis colophon. Marvel reserves the right to change such markings at any time.

All new accounts will be required to fill out an application form detailing data required for credit checks and will also be asked to supply a list of the retailers whom they anticipate servicing.

Your signature on the monthly solicitation forms will signify your acceptance of the trade terms then in effect.

We trust that these new uniform trade terms to our comic collector distributors will satisfactorily meet the requirements of this valued part of our business.

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the Man of Steel introduces great accomplishments of mankind. E. Nelson Bridwell is also packaging a **Little Library Life of Superman**, a four volume boxed set of books, one each devoted to the stories of Krypton, Superbaby, Superboy and Superman.

And strictly for the collector's market, **The Superboy Spectacular** 1 will be produced as a non-newsstand, dollar-sized comic, on sale only through comic dealers' shops. The book will contain no ads, a new eight-page story by Bridwell and Curt Swan, and six reprints from the late 50s and early 60s, making it a collectors' oddity, if not a collectors' item.

The recent vacancies created in **Detective, World's Finest** and **Green Lantern** by Denny O'Neil's resignation and surfacing at Marvel have been left open pending Marv Wolfman's current contract negotiations. Meanwhile, the editorial assistant position held by Katherine Pritchard, highly publicized several months ago for its value in relieving Paul Levitz' workload, was quietly dissolved for no known reason, without the benefit of a press release.

Len Wein is beginning to settle into his editorial duties in earnest now that most of the books he has taken over have exhausted their inventories, and the convention summer is over. A new look is in store for the **Justice League of America** as Firestorm joins and Green Arrow quits. Jim Starlin will take over as the book's primary cover artist.

Wonder Woman is in line for a revamping as well, again. Len

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and Gerry Conway are taking a stab at capturing the old flavor of the series, and updating it to fit the style of the 80s. The major stumbling block at this time is finding an artist who will accept the assignment, which has bored more artists and writers than any other comic creation in history.

In **Men of War** 28, Len, Jack C. Harris and Dick Ayers will unveil Gravedigger's Guerillas—Force 13—introducing twelve new characters. All are criminals, cutthroats and killers, and admittedly inspired by the film **The Dirty Dozen**, with Gravedigger in the Lee Marvin role.

The Unknown Soldier will

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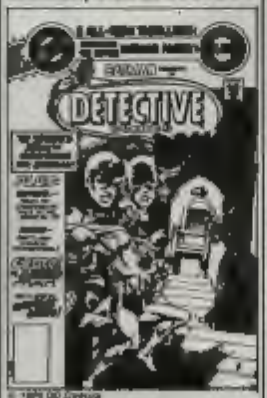
undergo relatively few changes, mainly because the basic concept is still sound. Len does plan to return to the more mythic foundations the book once had, so that The Unknown Soldier is more of a symbol of the everyman on the battlefield.

World War, however, will introduce ten new series, designed to appear several times a year on an alternating basis. *The Creature Commandos* is basically a take-off on the Batman concept, paraphrased as "Nazis are a cowardly lot, easily frightened by shadows in the night." To capitalize on Nazi-cowardice, three soldiers volun-



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teer to undergo an experiment which turns them into Frankenstein, Dracula and the Wolfman, and unleashes them on the battlefields of Europe. *The War That Time Forgot* is Len's other project, revival with Bob Kanigher as the writer, and possibly Ross Andru once again pencilling pterodactyls and trummy-guns.

In **The House of Mystery**, *I, Vampire* will debut soon, possibly with art by Tom Sutton. It is a contemporary vampire series with a twist—the vampire is trying to kill his centuries old fiances because she is enjoying the night life too much. J. M. DeMatteis will script.

In **The Flash**, a combination of the Julie Schwartz and Ross Andru editorial direction will be pursued, and a new supporting cast introduced. There will also be an addition to the Rogue's Gallery—the first in several years.

In a recent expansion move, Mattel Toys bought out the Western Publishing Company for what was reported to be close to $130 million. Western, whose comic outlet is Gold Key, is reportedly shuffling their ranks, cancelling four titles and going mostly reprint. In a parallel move, not necessarily related, Walt Disney Productions have been rumored to be investigating producing their own line of comics after their agreement with Gold Key expires. They would be joining Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc. in trying to elevate the quality of their comics by doing them outside the established industry. Coverage of these developments will be expanded in future issues of **MEDIASCENE**.●

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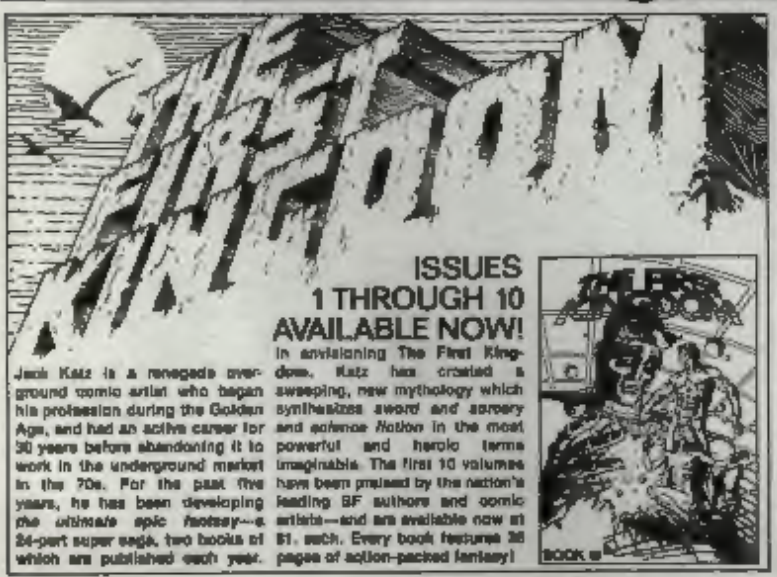

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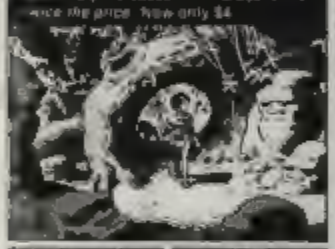

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